PEE·WEE HARRIS

ON THE TRAIL

PERCY KEESE FITZHUGH

Boy Scouts of America
Troop 52

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PEE-WEE HARRIS ON THE TRAIL

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THE TOM SLADE BOOKS
THE ROY BLAKELEY BOOKS
THE PEE-WEE HARRIS BOOKS

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PEE-WEE HARRIS ON THE TRAIL

CHAPTER I

THE LONE FIGURE

THE night was bleak and cold. All through the melancholy, cheerless day, the first chill of autumn had been in the air. Toward evening the clouds had parted, showing a steel-colored sky in which the sun went down a great red ball, tinting the foliage across the river with a glow of crimson. A sun full of rich light but no heat.

The air was heavy with the pungent fragrance of burning leaves. The gutters along Main Street were full of these fluttering, red memorials of the good old summer-time.

But there were other signs that the melancholy days had come. Down at the Bridgeboro station was a congestion of trunks and other luggage bespeaking the end of the merry play season.

And saddest of all, the windows of the stationery stores were filled with pencil-boxes and blank books and other horrible reminders of the opening of school.

Look where one would, these signs confronted the boys of Bridgeboro, and there was no escaping them. Even the hardware store had straps and tin lunch boxes now filling its windows, the same window where fishing rods and canoe paddles had lately been displayed.

Even the man who kept the shoe store had turned traitor and gathered up his display of sneaks and scout moccasins, and exhibited in their places a lot of school shoes. "Sensible footwear for the student" he called them. Even the drug store where mosquito dope and ice cream sodas had been sold now displayed a basket full of small sponges for the sanitary cleansing of slates. The faithless wretch who kept this store had put a small sign on the basket reading, "For the classroom." One and all, the merchants of Main Street had gone over to the Board of Education and all signs pointed to school.

But the most pathetic sight to be witnessed on

that sad, chill, autumn night, was the small boy in a threadbare gray sweater and shabby cap who stood gazing wistfully into the seductive windows of Pfiffel's Home Bakery. The sight of him standing there with his small nose plastered against the glass, looking with silent yearning upon the jelly rolls and icing cakes, was enough to arouse pity in the coldest heart.

Only the rear of this poor, hungry little fellow could be seen from the street, and if his face was pale and gaunt from privation and want, the hurrying pedestrians on their cheerful way to the movies were spared that pathetic sight.

All they saw was a shabby cap and an ill-fitting sweater which bulged in back as if something were being carried in the rear pocket. And there he stood, a poor little figure, heedless of the merry throngs that passed, his wistful gaze fixed upon a four-story chocolate cake, a sort of edible skyscraper, with a tiny dome of a glazed cherry upon the top of it. And of all the surging throng on Main Street that bleak, autumnal night, none noticed this poor fellow.

Yes, one. A lady sitting in a big blue auto-

mobile saw him. And her heart, tenderer than the jelly rolls in Pfiffel's window, went out to him. Perhaps she had a little boy of her own. . . .

CHAPTER II

A PATHETIC SIGHT

We shall pay particular attention to this sumptuous automobile which was such as to attract attention in modest Bridgeboro. For one thing it was of a rich shade of blue, whereas, the inhabitants of Bridgeboro being for the most part dead, their favorite color in autos was black.

The car, indeed, was the latest super six Hunkajunk touring model, a vision of grace and colorful beauty, set off with trimmings of shiny nickel. The Hunkajunk people had outdone themselves in this latest model and had produced "the car of a thousand delights." That seemed a good many, but that is the number they announced, and surely they must have known.

When one sat in the soft, spacious rear seat of the Hunkajunk touring model, one felt the sensation of sinking into a—what shall I say? One had a sort of sinking spell. You will pay particular attention to the luxurious rear seat

of this car because it was destined to be the couch of a world hero, rivalling Cleopatra's famous barge which you will find drifting around in the upper grade history books.

This was the only super six Hunkajunk touring car in Bridgeboro and it belonged to the Bartletts who on this momentous night occupied its front seat.

"Do look at that poor little fellow," said Mrs. Bartlett to her husband. "Stop for just a second; I *never* saw such a pathetic picture in my *life!*"

"Oh, what's the use stopping?" said Mr. Bartlett good-humoredly.

"Because I'm not going to the Lyric Theatre and have that poor little hungry urchin haunting me all through the show. I don't believe he's had *anything* to eat all day. Just see how he looks in that window, it's *pathetic.* Poor little fellow, he may be *starving* for all we know. I'm going to give him twenty-five cents; have you got the change?"

"You mean *I'm* going to give it to him?" laughed Mr. Bartlett, stopping the car.

"He's just *eating* the things with his *eyes.*"

said Mrs. Bartlett with womanly tenderness. "Look at that shabby sweater. Probably his father is a drunken wretch."

"We'll be late for the show," said Mr. Bartlett.

"I don't care anything about the show," his wife retorted. "Do you suppose I want to see The Bandit of Harrowing Highway or whatever it is? If we get there in time for the educational films, that's all I care about. You gave money for the starving children of France. Do you suppose I'm going to sit face to face with a little boy—*starving?*"

"I can't see his face," said Mr. Bartlett, "but he looks as if he had the Woolworth Building in his back pocket."

"Little boy," Mrs. Bartlett called in her sweetest tone, "here is some money for you. You go into that store and—*gracious me,* it's Walter Harris! What on earth are you doing here, Walter? I thought you were a poor little—I thought you were hungry."

The sturdy but diminutive form and the curly head and frowning countenance which stood confronting her were none other than those of Peewee Harris, B.S.A. (Boy of Special Appetite or

Boy Scouts of America, whichever you please), and he stared her full in the face without shame.

"That's the time you guessed right," he said. "I am."

CHAPTER III

THREE GOOD TURNS

"GIVE him the money," laughed Mr. Bartlett.

"I will do no such thing," said his wife. "I thought you were a poor little starving urchin, Walter. Wherever did you get that sweater?"

"I don't believe he's had anything to eat for half an hour," said Mr. Bartlett. "Well, how is my old college chum, Pee-wee? You make her give you the twenty-five cents, Pee-wee."

"A scout can't accept money like that," said Mrs.. Bartlett reprovingly, "it's against their rules. Don't you know that?"

Pee-wee cast a longing glance back at the window of Pfiffel's Bakery and then proceeded to set Mrs. Bartlett right on the subject of the scout law.

"It—it depends on what you call rules; see?" he said.

"And on what you call hungry," added Mr. Bartlett.

"If—if you—kind of—want to do a good turn, I haven't got any right to stop you, have I?" Pee-wee said. "Because good turns are the main things. Gee whiz, I haven't got any right to interfere with those. I haven't got any right to accept money for a service, but suppose—suppose there's a jelly roll—"

"There is," said Mr. Bartlett, "but in two minutes there isn't going to be. You go in and get that jelly roll as a favor to Mrs. Bartlett. And hurry up back and we'll take you to the Lyric."

"I was going there anyway," Pee-wee said, "I want to see The Bandit of Harrowing Highway, it's in five reels."

"Well, you come along with us," said Mr. Bartlett, "and then you'll be doing two good turns. You'll be doing a favor to Mrs. Bartlett by buying a jelly roll and you'll be doing a favor to me by making a party of three to see The Bandit of Harrowing Highway. What do you say?"

"Three's my lucky number," said Pee-wee. Then suddenly bethinking himself he added,

"but I don't mean I want to get three jelly rolls —you understand."

"Yes, we understand," said Mrs. Bartlett.

So it befell that Pee-wee, alias Walter Harris, scout of the first class (in quality if not in quantity) found himself riding luxuriously down Main Street in the rear seat of Mr. Bartlett's big Hunkajunk touring car, eating a jelly roll with true scout relish, for it was now close to eight o'clock and Pee-wee had not eaten anything since supper-time. Having completed this good turn to Mrs. Bartlett he proceeded to do a good turn to himself by bringing forth two sandwiches out of the pocket usually associated with a far more dangerous weapon. This was his emergency kit which he always carried. Morning, noon, or night, he always carried a couple of sandwiches the same as motorists carry extra tires.

And while he ate he talked. "Gee whiz, I'm crazy to see that picture," he said.

"We usually go for the educational films," said Mrs. Bartlett.

"I don't like anything that's got education in it," Pee-wee said. "Even when I go to vaude-

ville I don't like educated monkeys and cats and things. I like bandits and things like that. What's your favorite thing?"

"Well, I like scouts," said Mr. Bartlett.

"Mine's ice cream cones," said Pee-wee. "Is this a new car? I bet I know what kind it is, it's a Hunkajunk. I like hot frankfurters too. I can tell all the different kinds of cars because a scout is supposed to be observant. Do you like gumdrops? I'm crazy about those."

"But where did you get that sweater?" Mrs. Bartlett asked.

"Do you want me to tell you about it? It belongs to the man that takes care of our furnace; he's got a peach of a tattoo mark on his arm. My mother told me I had to wear a sweater so I grabbed that as I went through the back hall. I always go out through the kitchen, do you know why?"

"I think I can guess," said Mr. Bartlett.

"And the cap?" Mrs. Bartlett asked.

"You know the burglar that came to our house?"

"No, I never met him," said Mrs. Bartlett.

"I bet you don't like burglars, hey? He left

this cap. He didn't get anything and I got the cap so that shows I'm always lucky. My mother doesn't want me to wear it. Gee whiz, she hates burglars. Anyway, it's good and comfortable. My father says if he comes back for it I have to give it to him."

"Well, you certainly don't look like Walter Harris, the boy scout I have always known," said Mrs. Bartlett.

"Don't you care," said Pee-wee. "If you're a scout you're a scout, no matter if you don't wear anything."

"Oh, how dreadful," said Mrs. Bartlett.

"I know worse things than that," said Pee-wee.

"Well, tell us about the scouts," Mr. Bartlett encouraged him.

"Shall I tell you all about them?"

"Surely, begin at the beginning."

"That's law one, it's about honor; do you know what that is?"

"I've heard of it," said Mr. Bartlett.

"A scout has to be honorable, see? That comes first of all."

"Before eating?"

"Eating is all the way through it."

"Oh, I see."

"A scout has to be so—kind of—you know, so honorable that nobody could suspect him, see? If you're a scout that means that everybody knows you're all right. There are a lot of other laws too."

"Well, here we are at the Lyric," said Mr. Bartlett, "so let's go in and see what The Bandit of Harrowing Highway thinks about honor."

Leaving the car in front of the theatre the three elbowed their way through the long, crowded lobby and soon Pee-wee Harris, scout, was no longer in Bridgeboro but among rugged mountains where a man with a couple of pistols in his belt and a hat as big as an umbrella reined up a spirited horse and waited for a caravan and all that sort of stuff. . . .

CHAPTER IV

THE FIVE REELER

And meanwhile something very real happened. Two men in khaki, but without any pistols in their belts, rode slowly up to the front of the Lyric Theatre in a big blue touring car and stopped.

It was one of those palatial cars "of a thousand delights," a new super six Hunkajunk touring model. A couple of policemen, safeguarding the public's convenience, had moved the Bartlett car beyond the main entrance in the interest of late comers and it was in this vacated space that the second medley of blue and nickel was now thoughtlessly parked. No cars came along after it so there it remained with a little group of admirers about it.

The few loiterers in the lobby glanced curiously at the two young men. These strangers strode in laughing in a way of mutual banter, as if their sudden decision to see the show was quite amusing to themselves.

No one recognized them; they must have come from out of town. They wore khaki suits, with flapping brimmed hats of a color to match and their faces were brown with the wholesome, permanent tan of outdoor life. They seemed greatly amused with themselves and their breezy manner and negligee which smacked of the woods attracted the attention of Bridgeboro's staff of unpaid censors who hung out in and about the Lyric's lobby. But little, apparently, did the strangers care what was said and thought of them.

One of them bought the tickets, to the hearty indignation of the other, and they disappeared into the terrible fastnesses along Harrowing Highway where they tumbled boisterously into a couple of seats off the center aisle, "right within pistol shot of the bandit," as one of them laughingly remarked to the other.

In the last reel the bandit was captured by a sheriff's posse, the young school teacher from the east whom he had villainously kidnapped was set free and went to live on a ranch with the hero who also carried several pistols, and the detective whom the millionaire had sent from the

east (and who likewise carried several pistols) became a train robber and nearly killed the millionaire whom he met in the middle of the desert (carrying pistols) and who killed him instead and was in turn mortally wounded by the partner he had ruined and who had nothing left but several pistols.

And then Scout Harris fell asleep, and slept through the first part of the educational films. In a kind of jumbled dream he saw President Harding (with pistols) receiving a delegation of ladies (all armed) and then he felt a tapping on his shoulder.

"Walter," Mrs. Bartlett whispered pleasantly, "if you don't care about these pictures why don't you just go out and curl up in the back of the car and have a *real* good nap. Then when we come out we'll all stop and have some cream before we go home and we'll leave you at your house."

Pee-wee was too sleepy to answer; his mind was awake to but two things, ice cream and pistols. In a kind of stupor he looked to make sure that Mrs. Bartlett was not armed and then, dragging himself from his seat he stumbled up the aisle, through the lobby, across the sidewalk,

and tumbled into the rear seat of the big car that seemed waiting to receive him. He was just awake enough to realize that the night was cold and he pulled the heavy blanket over him and was dead to the world.

Many adventures awaited this redoubtable young scout but one terrible ordeal he escaped. In this he was, as he had said, lucky. For the very next picture on the screen after he had made his half-conscious exit, showed a lot of children in Europe being fed out of the munificent hand of Uncle Sam. And Pee-wee could never have stayed in his seat and quietly watched that tormenting performance.

CHAPTER V

R-R-R-ROBBERS!

SCOUT HARRIS never knew exactly when he passed out of the realm of dreams into the realm of wakefulness, for in both conditions pistols played a leading part. He was aware of a boy scout holding Secretary Hoover at bay with two pistols and Mr. Ellsworth, his scoutmaster, rescuing the statesman with several more pistols. And then he was very distinctly aware of someone saying,

"How many pistols have you got?"

"Twenty-seven," another voice answered.

"I've got forty-three and two blackjacks," said the first voice.

"You're wrong," said the other.

"I jotted them down," the first voice replied.

"We should worry," the other one laughed.

At this appalling revelation of seventy pistols between them, to say nothing of two blackjacks,

there seemed indeed very little for the speakers to worry about. But for Scout Harris, whose whole stock of ammunition consisted of a remnant of sandwich and the almost naked core of an apple, there seemed much to worry about.

Pee-wee realized now that he was awake and being borne along at an excessive rate of speed. He knew that he was in Bartlett's big Hunkajunk car and that the dark figures with all the firearms on the front seat were not Mr. and Mrs. Bartlett.

Trembling, he spread the robe so as the more completely to cover his small form including his head. For a moment he had a wild impulse to cast this covering off and scream, or at least to jump from the speeding car. But a peek from underneath the robe convinced him of the folly of this. To jump would be to lose his life; to scream—well, what chance would he have with two bloodthirsty robbers armed with seventy pistols and two blackjacks? There were few boy scouts who could despatch an apple core with such accuracy of aim as W. Harris, but of what avail is an apple core against seventy pistols?

He could not hear all that was said on the front seat but the fragments of talk that he did hear were alarming in the last degree.

"—best way to handle them," said one of those dark figures.

"I've got a couple of dead ones to worry about," said the other.

Pee-wee curled up smaller under the robe and hardly breathed. Indeed two dead ones was something to worry about. Suppose—suppose *he* should be the third!

"One for me, but I'm not worrying about him," said the other.

"We'll get away with it," his companion commented.

Then followed some talk which Pee-wee could not hear, but he felt certain that it was on their favorite topic of murder. Then he overheard these dreadful, yet comparatively consoling words:

"Trouble with him is he always wants to kill; he's gun crazy. Take them if you want to, but what's the use killing? That's what I said to him."

"Steal—"

"Oh sure, that's just what I told him," the speaker continued; "steal up—"

"Step on it," the other interrupted, "we're out in the country now."

The big super six Hunkajunk car darted forward and Scout Harris could hear the purring of the big engine as the machine sped along through the solemn darkness. A momentary, cautious glimpse from under the big robe showed him that they were already far from the familiar environs of Bridgeboro, speeding along a lonely country road.

Now and then they whizzed past some dark farmhouse, or through some village in which the law abiding citizens had gone to their beds. Occasionally Pee-wee, peeking from beneath the robe, saw cheerful lights shining in houses along the way and in his silent terror and apprehension he fancied these filled with boy scouts in the full enjoyment of scout freedom; scouts who were in no danger of being added to some bloody list of dead ones.

That he, Pee-wee Harris, mascot of the Raven Patrol, First Bridgeboro Troop, should have come to this! That he should be carried away

by a pair of inhuman wretches, to what dreadful fate he shuddered to conjecture. That *he,* Scout Harris, whose reputation for being wide awake had gone far and wide in the world of scouting, should be carried away unwittingly by a pair of thieves and find himself in imminent peril of being added to that ghastly galaxy of "dead ones." It was horrible.

Pee-wee curled up under the robe so as to disarm any suspicion of a human form beneath that thick, enveloping concealment and even breathed with silent caution. Suppose—*suppose*—oh horrors—suppose he should have to sneeze!

CHAPTER VI

A MESSAGE IN THE DARK

PEE-WEE seldom had any doubts about anything. What he knew he *knew*. And what is still better, he knew that he knew it. No one ever had to remind Pee-wee that he knew a thing. He not only knew it and knew that he knew it, but he knew that everybody that he knew, knew that he knew it. As he said himself, he was "absolutely positive."

Pee-wee knew all about scouting; oh, everything. He knew how and where tents should be put up and where spring water was to be found. He did not know all about the different kinds of birds, but he knew all about the different kinds of eats, and there are more kinds of eats than there are kinds of birds. How the Bridgeboro troop would be able to get along without their little mascot was a question. For he was their "fixer." That was his middle name—"fixer."

And of all of the things of which Pee-wee was "absolutely positive" the thing of which he was the *most* positive was that two thieves connected with the "crime wave" were riding away in Mr. Bartlett's big Hunkajunk "touring model" and carrying him (a little scout model) along with them.

What should he do? Being a scout, he took council of his wits and decided to write on a page of his hikebook a sentence saying that he was being carried away by thieves, giving his name and address, and cast this overboard as a shipwrecked sailor puts a message in a bottle. Then someone would find the message and come to rescue him.

But with what should he weight his fluttering message, so that it would fall in the road? Pee-wee was a scout of substance and had amassed a vast fortune in the way of small possessions. He owned the cap of a fountain pen, a knob from a brass bedstead, two paper clips, a horse's tooth, a broken magnifying glass, a device for making noises in the classroom, a clock key, a glass tube, a piece of chalk for making scout signs, and other treasures. But these were in the pockets of his

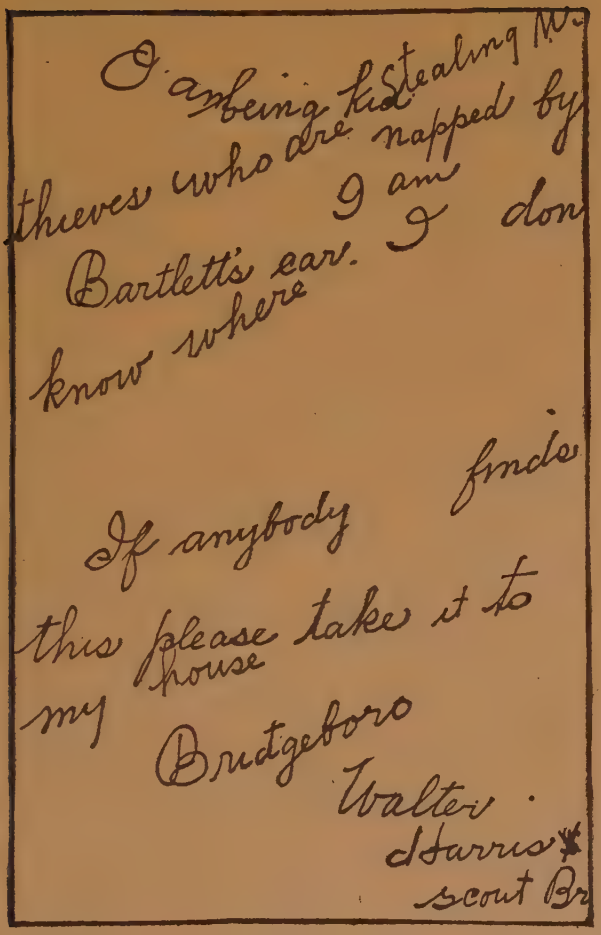
scout uniform and could be of no service to him in his predicament.

The only trinket which he had was the fragment of a sandwich. Having reduced this, by a generous bite, to one-half its size, he wrote his note as well as he could without moving too much. One deadly weapon he had with him and that was a safety pin. With this he now pierced the piece of sandwich to the heart, linking it forever with that note written tremblingly in a moment of forlorn hope and utter darkness, under the kindly concealment of the buffalo robe.

On the opposite page is the note and how it looked.

Having cast this last message out upon the road he withdrew his arm cautiously back under the robe and lay as nearly motionless as possible, prepared for the worst.

If he should never be heard of again, it would seem both touching and appropriate, that this memento of him should be a morsel of food (which he loved) fastened with a safety pin which was the weapon that he always carried.


O am being kidnapped by
thieves who are stealing W.
Bartlett's car. I am
know where I don
If anybody finds
this please take it to
my house
Bridgeboro
Walter.
Harris
scout Br

CHAPTER VII

LOCKED DOORS

Like the ground-hog, Pee-wee did not emerge again until the occasion was more propitious. For fully an hour the car ran at high speed which afforded him some hope that the strong arm of the law might intervene. But the strong arm of the law was apparently under its pillow in delicious slumber. Not a snag did those bloody fugitives encounter in their flight.

At last the car slowed down and Pee-wee could feel that it was turning into another road. His unwitting captors were evidently either nervous or sleepy, for they talked but little.

The car proceeded slowly now, and when our hero ventured to steal a quick glimpse from under his covering he perceived that they were going along a road so dark and narrow that it seemed like a leafy tunnel. The somber darkness and utter silence of this sequestered region made the deed of these outlaws seem all the

blacker. There was now no doubt whatever of the criminal nature of their bold enterprise. For surely no law-abiding, civilized beings lived in such a remote wilderness as now closed them in.

Soon the car came to a stop, and Pee-wee's thumping heart almost came to a stop at the same time. Suppose they should lift the robe? What would they do? And quite as much to the point, what should *he* do? A sudden impulse to throw off his kindly camouflage and run for all he was worth, seized him. But he thought of those seventy pistols and two blackjacks and refrained. Should he face them boldly, like the hero in a story book and say, "Ha, ha, you are foiled. The eyes of the scout have followed you in your flight and you are caught!"

No he would not do that. A scout is supposed to be cautious. He would remain under the buffalo robe.

Presently he heard the unmistakable sound and felt the unmistakable feeling of the car being run into some sort of a shelter. The voices of the thieves sounded different, more

hollow, as voices heard in small quarters indoors. A little suggestion of an echo to them.

Pee-wee Harris, scout, did not know where he was or what was going on, but he *felt* that four walls surrounded him. The plot was growing thicker. And it was suffocating under that heavy robe, now that there was no free air blowing about it.

"Where's the stuff?" one of the men asked.

"On the back seat," said the other.

Pee-wee trembled.

"Oh, no, I guess it's on the floor," the man added. "I think I put the silver cup under the back seat—"

Pee-wee shuddered. So they had been stealing silver cups.

"Either there or—oh, here it is."

Pee-wee breathed again.

Then he heard no more voices. But he heard other sounds. He heard the creaking of a heavy rolling door. He heard a sound as if it were being bolted or fastened on the inside. Then he heard the slamming of another door and a muffled, metallic sound as of someone locking it on the outside. Then he heard footsteps, faint-

er, fainter. . . . Then he heard a sound which seemed to him familiar. He could not liken it to anything in particular, but it sounded familiar, a kind of clanking, metallic sound. Then he heard a voice say, "Let me handle her, give her a shove, hold her down, that's right."

Pee-wee's blood ran cold. They were killing someone out there; some poor captive maiden, perhaps. . . .

Then he heard no more.

CHAPTER VIII

A DISCOVERY

THE ominous sound of doors rolling and of clanking staples and padlocks told Pee-wee all too conclusively that he was a prisoner, and he was seized with panic terror at the thought of being locked in a dungeon where he could hardly see his hand before his face.

As to where he was, he had no guess more than that he was miles and miles from home. But along with his fright came a feeling of relief that he was no longer in company of those two scoundrels who were unwittingly responsible for his predicament. They would probably not return before morning and he would have at least a little breathing spell in which to consider what he should do, if indeed he could do anything.

The departure of his captors gave him courage and some measure of hope. Freedom he did not hope for, but a brief respite from peril

was his. Time, time! What the doomed crave and pray for. That, at least was his.

He had presence of mind enough to refrain from making any sound, for the thieves might still be in the neighborhood for all he knew. The last he had heard of them they had been talking of "handling her" and "giving her a shove" and he did not want them to come back and "handle" *him*.

So he sat on the rear seat of the big Hunka-junk car ready to withdraw beneath the robe at the first sound of approaching footsteps. If he had been free to make a companionable noise, to whistle or to hum, or to listen to the friendly sound of his own movements he would have felt less frightened. But the need of absolute silence in that dark prison agitated him, and in the ghostly stillness every creak made the place seem haunted.

If he could only have seen where he was! He knew now something of the insane terrors of dark and solitary confinement. So strongly did this terror hold him that for a minute or two he dared not stir upon the seat for fear of causing the least sound which the darkness and

strangeness of the place might conjure into spectral voices.

There is but one way to dispel these horrors and that is by throwing them off with quick movement and practical resolve.

He jumped down out of the car, and groping his way through the darkness stumbled against a wall. Moving his hand along this he found it to be of rough boards. Indeed, he had a more conclusive proof of this by the fact that a large splinter of the dried wood pierced his finger, paining acutely. He pulled it out and sucked the bleeding cut, then wound his handkerchief around it. One discovery, at least, he had made; the building, whatever it was, was old. The smell of the board sides informed him of that much. And there was no flooring.

He now stood thinking, wondering what he should do next. And as he paused he heard a sound near him. A sound as of quick, low breathing. In the open such a sound would not have been audible, but in the ghostly darkness of that strange prison he could hear it clearly when he listened. Sometimes he could distinguish the momentary pauses between the breaths and

sometimes the faint sound seemed continuous. As he listened in silent, awful terror, the thumping of his heart seemed to interrupt the steady, low sound.

It was not normal breathing surely, but it was the sound of breathing. He was certain of that. He thought it was over near the car.

CHAPTER IX

THE TENTH CASE

THE thought that there was a living presence in that spooky dungeon struck terror to Pee-wee's very soul. He could not bring himself to move, much less to speak. But he could not stand idly where he was, and if he should stumble over a human form in that unknown blackness. . . . What could be more appalling than that? Was this uncanny place a prison for poor, injured captives? Was there, lying just a few feet from him, some suffering victim of those scoundrels? What did it mean? Pee-wee could only stand, listening in growing fear and agitation.

"Who's there?" he finally asked, and his own trembling voice seemed strange to him.

There was no answer.

"Who's there?" he asked again.

Silence; only the low, steady sound; punctuated, as it seemed by his own heart beats.

"Who—is—is anybody there?"

Then, suddenly, in a kind of abandon, he cast off his fears and groped his way with hands before him toward the low sound. Presently his hand was upon something round and small. It had a kind of tube running from it. He felt about this and touched something else. He felt along it; it was smooth and continuous.

And then he knew, and he experienced infinite relief. His hand was upon the spare tire on the rear of the car. The air was slowly escaping in irregular jerks from the valve of this tire, making that low sound, now hardly audible, now clearer and steadier, that escaping air will sometimes cause when passing through a leaky valve. The darkness and Pee-wee's own thumping heart had contributed to the horrible illusion and he smiled in the utter relief which he experienced by the discovery.

But one other discovery he had made also which gave him an inspiration and made him feel foolish that he had not had the inspiration before. The little round thing that he had felt in about the center of the tire was the red tail light of the car; he realized that now. And

this discovery reminded him that he could have all the light he wanted by the mere touching of a switch.

"That shows how stupid I am," said Pee-wee. He was so relieved and elated that he could afford to be generous with self accusations. "One thing sure, it shows how when you hunt for a thing you find something else, so if you're mistaken it's a good thing."

This was logical, surely, and he now proceeded to avail himself of the benefit of his chance discovery. Presently this dank, mysterious, spooky dungeon would be bathed in welcome light. Pee-wee climbed into the front seat and moved his hand across the array of nickel dials and buttons on the instrument board. There seemed to be a veritable multitude of little handles and indicators for the control of the Hunkajunk super six touring model. Not even a wireless apparatus, with which Pee-wee's scouting experience had made him familiar, had such a variety of shiny little odds and ends.

Having no knowledge of these things he moved his hand among them cautiously, fearful lest

some inadvertent touch might cause the car to go careering into the board wall. He bent his head close to the instrument board in search of printed words indicating the purpose of the various buttons, but the darkness was too dense for him to see anything but the shiny nickel. At the same time his wandering foot, conducting an exploration of its own, came against a little knob.

Pee-wee never knew precisely what he did to cause the startling occurrence which followed. There were two switch buttons, side by side, and in one a small key had been left. Evidently he decided that this was the lighting switch. He was just able to decipher the word IGNITION above it. But alas, the word ignition means SPARK on an auto.

Whether he purposely, in curiosity, stepped on the button in the floor he never knew. In nine cases out of ten it would have required more effort to start the Hunkajunk touring model. But this was the tenth case. In a frantic effort to stop the power, or perhaps in groping with his hand, he pulled down the spark lever, and the six cylinder brute of an engine awoke to life!

Out of the exhaust pipe in back poured the fatal volume of gaseous smoke which spells death, horrible and suffocating, when locked and barred doors and windowless walls enclose the wretched, gasping victim as in a tomb.

CHAPTER X

A RACE WITH DEATH

In close confinement it is all over in a minute in these cases. The victim is poisoned and suffocated like a rat in a hole. Surprising as it may seem, this deadly poison works faster than its victim can act. And with darkness for its ally the only hope lies in presence of mind and quick action.

Pee-wee Harris was a scout. Laugh at him and make fun of him as you will, he was a scout. He was at once the littlest scout and the biggest scout that ever scouting had known. He boasted and bungled, but out of his bungling came triumph. He fell, oh such falls as he fell! But he always landed right side up. He could save the world with a blunder. And then boast of the blunder.

He was not a motorist, he was a scout. Wrong or right (and he was usually wrong), he was a scout. He was a scout with something

left over. Like a flash of lightning he jumped into the car and shut off the switch, but the imprisoned air was already heavy with the deadly fumes and his head swam. Shutting off the switch would not save him; nothing would save him unless his mind and body acted together with lightning swiftness.

Say that he made a "bull" of it in starting the engine, and you are welcome to say that of him. But after that the spirit and training of the scout possessed him. *You,* with all respect to you, would have died a frightful death in that black prison.

Pee-wee Harris, scout, tore his handkerchief from around his cut finger, unscrewed the cap of the radiator, dipped his handkerchief into the hole, bit off two small pieces of the warm, dripping cloth, and stuffed them into his ears. The wet handkerchief he stuffed into his mouth. And so Scout Harris gained a few precious moments, *only a few,* in which to make a desperate effort to find a way out!

You would have forgotten about the radiator full of water, I dare say....

Roy Blakeley (Silver Fox Patrol and not in

this story, thank goodness) said, long after these adventures were over, that a handkerchief stuffed in Pee-wee's mouth was a good idea and that it was a pity it had been removed. But Pee-wee Harris was a scout, he was a couple of scouts, and he saved his life by scout law and knowledge. And there you are.

Acting quickly he now groped his way around to the rear of the car. It was odd how quickly his mind worked in his desperate predicament. His eyes stung and his throat pained him and he knew that he had won only the chance of a race with death. But what more does a scout want than a fighting chance? His wits, spurred by the emergency, were now alert and he recalled that the men who had stolen the car had rolled one door shut and slammed another. So perhaps the rolling door had been barred inside. Where the small door was he did not know, and there was no time now to make a groping exploration of the sides. The rolling door must be in back of the car, he knew that.

He was dizzy now and on the point of falling. His wrists tingled and his head ached acutely. Only his towering resolve kept him on his feet.

Groping from behind the car he touched the boards and felt along them for some indication of the door. Presently his hand came upon an iron band set in a large staple through which was inserted a huge wooden plug. This he pulled out and hauling on the staple slowly rolled open a great wide door.

A fresh gust of autumn wind blew in upon him, a cleansing and refreshing restorative, as if it had been waiting without to welcome the sturdy little scout into the vast, fragrant woods which he loved. And the bright stars shone overhead, and the air was laden with the pungent scent of autumn. It seemed as if all Nature, solemn and companionable, was there to greet the little mascot of the Raven Patrol, First Bridgeboro Troop, B. S. A.

The car of a thousand delights had so far afforded very few delights to Pee-wee Harris.

CHAPTER XI

A RURAL PARADISE

PEE-WEE looked about him at an enchanted scene. He seemed to have been transported to a region made to order for the Boy Scouts of America. That a pair of auto thieves should have brought him to this rural Paradise seemed odd enough.

As he gazed about and looked up at the quiet star-studded sky his fears were all but dispelled. For were not the friendly woods and water near him? They seemed like rescuing allies now. In the soft, enveloping arms of those silent woods he would find safety and shelter, and so he should find his way home through their dim concealment.

The building in which the car had been left was an old weather-beaten shack, which, judging from the sawdust all about, might once have been used as an ice-house. This seemed likely, for it stood near the shore of a placid lake in

the black bosom of which shone a myriad of inverted stars and through which was a golden path of flickering moonlight. The ice-house, or whatever it was, had never been painted and the grain stood out on the shrunken wood like veins in an aged hand.

At a respectable distance from the woods near the shore where Pee-wee stood was a sizable village, or young town, big enough to have traffic signs and parking zones and a main street and a movie show and such like pretentious things. Between this town and the shore were a few outlying houses, but mostly sparse woodland. To the north the woods were thicker.

The lights of this neighboring town formed a cheery background to the dark, silent lake shore. This town was West Ketchem and the chief sensation in West Ketchem during the last few years had been the destruction by fire of the public school, a calamity for which every boy went in mourning.

Across the lake, Pee-wee could see other and fewer lights. These belonged to a smaller village in which nothing at all had ever happened, not even the burning of its school. Far from it.

The school stood there in all its glory, under the able supervision of Barnabas Wise and Birchel Rodney, the local board of education.

About in the center of the lake, Pee-wee saw a small red light. Sometimes there seemed to be two lights, but he thought that one was the reflection of the other in the water. The light seemed very lonely, yet very inviting out there. He supposed it was on a boat. Perhaps some one was fishing. . . .

But in all this surrounding beauty and peacefulness, Pee-wee saw no sign of the murder of any captive maiden. His eagle eye *did* see where a boat had been drawn up on shore, and if any "shoves" and other cruel and abusive "handling" had been administered by those scoundrels with seventy pistols, it must have been to that poor defenseless boat. Or perhaps they were out in the middle of the lake at that very minute sinking their victim.

Anything might happen—in the mind of Scout Harris.

CHAPTER XII

ENTER THE GENUINE ARTICLE

At another time Pee-wee would have delighted to linger in this scout's Utopia. But his chief thought now was to take advantage of his fortunate escape. He had not the faintest idea where he was, more than that he was a full two hour's ride from home. That would be a long and lonely hike, even if he could find his way in the darkness.

He tried to recall the names of the various lakes in New Jersey and in the neighboring state of New York, and he recalled a good many, but that did not help him to identify this one. So he started up toward the town in the hope of identifying that.

The village petered out toward the lake; there were but a few houses. It was about eleven or twelve o'clock or after and the good people in the straggling cottages thereabout had put out their

lights and retired to slumber before that wicked hour.

There was a stillness and gloom about these uninviting, dark houses; a cheerlessness not to be found in the densest woods. They made Pee-wee feel lost and lonesome, as the dim, silent wilderness could never do.

Soon he reached the town, and there in the center of a spacious lawn was something which, in his loneliness and uncertainty, seemed the picture of gloom. The ruin of a building which had been burned to the ground. What a fire that must have been to witness! Better far than The Bandit of Harrowing Highway! Over a partly fallen arch, under which many reluctant feet had passed, Pee-wee could just make out the graven words: WEST KETCHEM PUBLIC SCHOOL.

West Ketchem. So that was where he was. But he had never heard of West Ketchem. The fame of this lakeside metropolis had not penetrated to surging Bridgeboro. At least it had not penetrated to the surging mind of Scout Harris. He tried to recall West Ketchem on the map of New Jersey in his school geography.

But evidently West Ketchem had scorned the geography. Or else the geography had scorned West Ketchem.

Undecided what to do, Pee-wee lingered a few moments among the mass of charred timbers, and desks ruined and laid low, and broken blackboards, all in an indiscriminate heap.

"I bet the fellers that live here are glad," he said to himself. "That isn't saying they have to believe in fires, except camp-fires, but anyway after it's all over they've got a right to be glad."

The situation of the school seemed to have been a sort of compromise between the claims of the lake and the claims of the town. It was not too far from the town and not too far from the lake. Perhaps it had been built within sight of the lake so that the West Ketchem student body could see it while at their lessons. A kind of slow torture.

Pee-wee had never before seen the familiar realities of school life thus brought low and lying in inglorious disorder at his feet. It gave him a feeling of triumph and had a fascination for him. Damp smelling books were here and there among the ruins, histories, arithmetics, algebras

and grammars. He could tread upon these with his valiant heel. A huge roll call book (ah, how well he knew it even in the darkness) lay charred and soggy near the assembly-room piano. Junk heaps had always had a fascination for Pee-wee and had yielded up some of his rarest treasures. But a school, with all its disciplinary claptrap reduced to a junk heap! He could not, even in this late hour and strange country, tear himself away from it.

But another influence caused him to hesitate. What should he do? There were hardly any lights in the town now. He was a scout and he could not reconcile himself to the commonplace device of going to someone's house and asking for shelter. His scout training had taught him self-reliance and resource, and here was the chance to apply them, to go home, to find his way without anyone's help. The lonely road called to him more than the dark houses did.

But how about the car? Mr. Bartlett's stolen car? Would it be the way of a scout to go home and tell about that? He had come in the car, Providence had made him its guardian, and he would take it back again and say, (or words to

this effect) "Here is your super six Hunkajunk car, Mr.Bartlett; they tried to steal it but I *foiled* them! I was disguised as a buffalo robe."

There was only one difficulty in the way of this heroic course and that was that he could not run the car. Never again would he touch one of those frightful nickel things on the instrument board. So, wishing to handle this harrowing situation alone, with true scout prowess and resource, he kicked around among the ruins of that tyrannous and fallen empire, and tried to devise some plan.

Suddenly he heard a sound near him. He paused in the darkness, his scout heel upon a poor, defenseless crumpled spelling book. Thus he stood in mingled triumph and agitation, his heart beating fast, every nerve on edge.

"Who—who's there?" he said.

He moved again, and was startled as his foot slipped off the charred timber on which he was walking. The brisk autumn wind was playing havoc among the débris, blowing damp pages over faster than anyone could turn them. It played among a burned chest of old examination papers,

scattering them like dried leaves. Correct or incorrect, they were all the same now. Pee-wee liked this roving, unruly wind, having its own way in that dominion of restriction. He liked its gay disregard of all this solemn claptrap.

But now he heard clearly the sound of footsteps among the ruins, footsteps picking their way as it seemed to him, through the uncertain support of all that various disorder. Groping, careful footfalls.

"Who's there?" he asked. And the only answer was a gust of wind.

Could it be those thieves in search of him? Or might it be the ghost of some principal or teacher lingering still among these remnants and reminders of authority?

Step, step—step.

Then from around the corner of a charred, upended platform appeared a face. A face with a cap drawn low over it. And presently a dark form emerged.

"Who—who are—you?" Pee-wee stammered.

"I'm a teacher as was here," the stranger said. "You needn't be scared of me, kiddo."

"I was just kind of looking around," Pee-wee explained apologetically.

"Here's a pencil fur yer," the stranger said. "I jes' picked it up."

Pee-wee accepted this as a flag of truce, and felt somewhat reassured. A man who would give him a pencil surely meant no harm. He had as much right to be there as Pee-wee had.

"If you were a teacher here I shouldn't think you'd say 'as was,'" Pee-wee ventured. "But gee whiz," he added, "I don't care how you say it." No teacher had ever before called him kiddo and he rather liked it. "Maybe you taught manual training, hey?" Pee-wee said. "Because they're kind of different."

"There's where you hit it," said the stranger.

"Manual training?"

"Right the first time, and I'm just sort of collecting some of my junk."

"That's one thing about me, I'm good at guessing," Pee-wee said. "I kinder knew you were that. Manual training, that's my favorite study because it isn't a study at all. I made a bird-house, I did, in manual training, a dandy big one."

"Bird-houses is a good thing to make," said the manual training teacher.

Pee-wee could not see his new acquaintance very well or the bundle which he carried. If the teacher had been after his junk he seemed to have been fortunate in finding it, for he had collected a considerable amount of booty. Indeed, he had but a minute before succeeded in disinterring the safe which had been in the principal's office, but here he had met with disappointment. He had, however, hit upon a microscope of some value from the equipment of the student laboratory and he had found a lady's handbag which he seemed to think worth keeping.

"What are *you* doing here?" he asked of Pee-wee.

CHAPTER XIII

A FRIEND IN NEED

"Do you want me to let you into a secret?" Pee-wee said. "I know where there's a stolen automobile. Maybe you'd like to help me take it back to its owner, hey? If you do you'll get an honourable mention in our troop-book. I was carried away in it by two thieves who didn't know I was in the car, because I was disguised, sort of, under the buffalo robe. Do you want to help me foil them?"

The manual training teacher seemed interested but a bit incredulous. He looked Pee-wee over and said, "what's all this?"

"Maybe you don't believe me but it's true," Pee-wee said. "Do you know how to run a car?"

"Anything from a flivver up," said the stranger.

"Shh," said Pee-wee, "this one is away, way up. It's a super six Hunkajunk, it belongs to a man where I live, in Bridgeboro, New Jersey."

"Well, what are you doing here?" the manual training teacher asked.

"I was kind of kidnapped accidentally. They did it but they didn't know it. They've got pistols and blackjacks and things and I heard them talk about stealing. I bet I'd have heard a lot more only my head was under the buffalo robe. If you'll help me we can circum—what do you call it—you know—circum——"

The teacher did not know. But his interest was aroused at this whispered tale of armed bandits and of a big stolen car. Pee-wee completed the tale in breathless excitement. He told all, from the beginning. "They locked it in," he concluded, "and went away; but one of the doors, the big one, was locked on the inside and I opened it. Anybody can take the car out. Those men have gone away across the lake. If you'll drive it to Bridgeboro you can stay at my house and have breakfast and I'll tell Mr. Bartlett that you helped me, and gee whiz, they'll thank, you a lot. Maybe you know about scouts because manual training teachers know a lot about scouts on account of scouts making bird-houses and all things like that, and so maybe you know about

good turns. That'll be a peach of a good turn. And if I tell about it you'll get a kind of a medal from our troop with your name on it. What's your name? Mine's Walter Harris, but the fellows in my troop call me Pee-wee, but I should worry about them. Will you help me? What's your name?"

"Mr. Swiper," said the stranger, rather thoughtfully; "let's go and look it over."

He was certainly considering the proposition and Pee-wee accompanied him back to the lake, keeping up a running fire of enthusiastic encouragement and representing to him the delight and self-satisfaction of circumventing a pair of scoundrels. "They've got pistols and everything," he said as a clincher, "and if they'd steal a car they'd kill somebody, wouldn't they?"

"Seventy pistols is a good many," said Mr. Swiper, incredulously.

"Sure it is," said Pee-wee excitedly; "it's more than Jesse James had. I guess they belong to a big band of thieves, hey? Maybe they've got a—a—a haunt on the other side of that lake, hey? Now you can see it's good to go to the

movies, hey? Because we could never circumfoil them if I hadn't, hey? They drove it right away from in front of the theater. Anyway," he added excitedly as he trotted along, "I'm glad I met you because now I don't have to wake up the police or anything, hey? And I bet Mr. and Mrs. Bartlett will be surprised when they see us bringing it back, won't they? I'll show you where we have our meetings."

Mr. Swiper was not carried off his feet by Pee-wee's excited talk. He was thoughtful and preoccupied.

"That's one thing I have no use for—thieves," Pee-wee said. "Gee whiz, I never took a ride with thieves before. But anyway it's going to be all right now. We'll just toot the horn in front of the house when we get there, hey? And I'll say—I'll say—'Here's your car Mr. Bartlett.' And then I'll introduce you to him, hey? And I bet he'll—anyway, you wouldn't take anything, would you? Money or anything like that?"

"Don't insult me," said Mr. Swiper.

"I didn't mean it," Pee-wee said apologetically; "scouts are like that, they won't take any-

thing for a service, but eats don't count, you can take eats. But I mean money——"

"Don't speak of money again," said Mr. Swiper.

CHAPTER XIV

SAVED!

THANKS to Pee-wee, the door of the rustic lake-side garage stood invitingly open.

"I won't—I won't say anything about money; gee whiz, you needn't have any fear," Pee-wee said, making a play for his companion's good-will; "gee, I wouldn't do that—I wouldn't. But you could take a medal, couldn't you? A scout good-will medal?" he added anxiously.

"Maybe," said Mr. Swiper.

"Gee, you'll *have* to take it," said Pee-wee; "our scoutmaster will make you."

Before entering the building, Mr. Swiper made an inspection of the lonely neighborhood, and looked out across the still, dark lake.

"That's where they went?" he asked.

"Sure, they won't see us," Pee-wee said reassuringly.

But the manual training teacher was not going

to take any chances with a crew of ruffians—not he.

"Even if they should see us or hear us," Pee-wee encouraged, "they wouldn't dare come after it, because it isn't theirs. They thought nobody would ever find it in here. It's good I was on the inside, hey?"

"That's the place to be," said Mr. Swiper.

"You bet it is," said Pee-wee. "Were you ever locked in a place?"

To this purely personal question, Mr. Swiper made no reply. Instead he walked about the car thoughtfully, then climbed into the front seat and turned on the dash-light. He seemed to know what he was doing. Pee-wee did not wait but excitedly climbed in beside him.

"Gee whiz, a feller's got to have nerve to steal a car, hasn't he?" he asked, unable in his elation to keep still.

"That's what," said Mr. Swiper briefly.

"It—it kind of—sort of—makes us feel like thieves, taking it," Pee-wee commented, looking about him rather fearfully, "but anyway we've got a right to, that's one sure thing. . . . Haven't we?"

"Sure."

"And it's all right, that's one sure thing. Oh boy, I'm glad I met you and you'll get as much credit as I do, that's sure. Anyway, we've got a right to take it away from the thieves, I hope. Gee, nobody can deny that. Anyway, I guess *you* don't feel scary."

"Guess they won't follow us," said Mr. Swiper. "Not if they know what's well for them. Thieves don't come after you, they run away from you."

"You bet they do," said Pee-wee, delighted at his new friend's rather generous contribution to the talk.

The engine now purred softly, the silent shifting into reverse gear told the young rescuer that a practiced hand was at the wheel. Slowly the big car backed out of the building and around till it headed into the dark over-grown road.

"You didn't put the lights on," Pee-wee said.

"Time enough for that," said his companion, who seemed quite accustomed to driving in the dark.

Presently the big super six Hunkajunk touring model was rolling silently along through the

woods, rescued, saved! Soon to be restored to its rightful owner by W. Harris, scout, B. S. A.

By the dash-light, Pee-wee obtained a first glimpse of his companion's face. There was nothing in particular about him, save a long, diagonal scar on his face which Pee-wee thought might have been caused by some tool in the ruined manual training room. The young man had also very short hair; it was so short, in fact, that it seemed almost like no hair at all. It was like a convict's hair.

CHAPTER XV

IN CAMP

THE light which Pee-wee had seen across the water was not on a boat as he had supposed. It was on a small island the very name of which would have delighted his heart, for it was called Frying-pan Island, because of its rough similarity of form to that delightful accessory of camp life. If Scout Harris could have eaten a waffle out of such a frying-pan he would have felt that he had not lived in vain.

This frying-pan, instead of being filled with fat, was filled with woods, and a little to the west of the center, where an omelet might have nestled in its smaller prototype, three tents were concealed in the enshrouding foliage. Down at the end of the handle of this frying-pan was good fishing, but it was marshy there, and sometimes after a heavy rain the handle was completely submerged. From an airplane the three white tents in the western side of the pan might have seemed

like three enormous poached eggs; that is, provided the aviator had an imagination.

It was upon the shore of this little island that the two young men who had driven the automobile from Bridgeboro pulled their boat ashore about ten minutes after they had all unknowingly locked Scout Harris in their makeshift lakeside garage. Considering that they were cut-throats and ruffians and all that sort of thing, their consciences seemed singularly clear, for they laughed and chatted as they made their way along the few yards of trail which led to their lair, or den, or haunt, or cave, or whatever you care to call it.

They were greeted by a chorus of boys who jumped up from around the camp-fire where they had been seated making demands upon them for news and booty.

"How about it? Can we stay here?"

"What kept you so long?"

"Did you get the silver cup?"

"I bet you didn't find out?"

"I bet you ate supper in a restaurant."

"We made rice cakes."

"Did you get the cup?"

"Let's see it."

"They didn't get it."

"Yes they did."

"I bet they didn't."

"I bet they did."

"Look at the smiles on their faces."

"I bet we have the town hall wished on us."

"I bet it's the fire-house."

"I feel it in my bones we have to go to school."

"Let's see the cup."

"Did you eat?"

"What is this, a questionnaire?" asked one of the arrivals, the one who had driven the car.

"Let's hear the worst."

"Break it gently."

"We thought your new junk wagon broke down."

"Don't say anything against his new junk wagon or he'll never tell us anything."

"Did you put the baby to bed?"

"Yes and locked him in."

"What kept you so late?"

"We got mixed up with a Bandit of Harrowing Highway."

"Who's he?"

"He's a villyan."

"A which?"

"A movie play."

"That's a nice thing for two scoutmasters to go and see. Your two troops are ashamed of you."

"If our two troops don't shut up—"

"We'll shut up—come on, *altogether!*"

Followed a welcome silence.

"We've gone to a lot of trouble today for you kids," said one of the scoutmasters. "We've got the cup but we had to wait a couple of hours for it. The merchants in the great metropolis of Bridgeboro are so slow that a turtle would be arrested for speeding there. Poke up the fire, Nick, we're cold, and I'll tell you all about our adventures. We've made a day of it, huh?"

The scout whom he called Nick jogged up the waning blaze while others brought a fresh log, and soon the camp-fire was roaring a warming, hearty welcome home to the weary scoutmasters. One of these (who was evidently young enough to be addressed by his christian name, for they called him Ned) sat on an old grocery box and related the happenings of the day, while the others

sprawled about, listening. Occasionally his fellew scoutmaster (Safety First they called him) contributed a few words.

"Well, the first thing we did when we got ashore was to—"

"Get out of the boat?" a scout asked. There was surely not much constraint between scouts and scoutmasters in this outfit.

"We went up to town and saw the school board; at least we saw Mr. Cram. He says everything's upside down and they don't know what they'll do—says there won't be any school for a month anyway. (Cries of despair.) They can't use the town hall and they can't use the firehouse and they're talking of using the old Wilder mansion. We told him if there wasn't going to be any school till the middle of October or so, we'd like to bunk right here on the island and study nature. He said, 'Go to it.' So there's no school for a month (murmurs of disappointment) and we've got to chip in and get some more groceries.

"We squared things with your parents and most of them are glad to get rid of you. How

about that, Safety First? Corby's sister is giving a party and hopes he'll stay away. Let's see now; oh yes, we bought some fishing tackle.

"Then we got some gas and started for Bridgeboro after the cup. We went after that cup like Sir Thomas Lipton. The jewelry man didn't have the engraving finished so we dropped in at a movie show and saw a fellow with a lot of pistols. How many pistols were there, First Aid? We counted them off coming back in the machine, there were seventy. Crazy stuff. That's the kind of stuff you kids fall for. Well, after the pistol shooting was over we got the cup and started back and here we are. Any questions?"

"Let's see the cup."

We left it in the machine. We'll get it in the morning. Now look here, you scouts. I want every last one of you to try for that cup. There are half a dozen of you that need to wake up. There are a few dead ones here; Harry, the crack shot—yes you—I'm looking right at you—I want you to can all this stuff about killing animals and get busy and do the best scout stunt of the season and win that cup. Understand? I was saying

to Safety First on the way home that a fellow gets more fun stealing up on an animal and piking him with a camera than he does poking around with an old air gun that he saw advertised in *Boy's Life*. That's what! I'm talking to you straight.

"Now here's a silver cup and it looks pretty swell all engraved with our patrol names and we drove way to Bridgeboro to get it. That cup's going to stand on the stump of that tree there—where the chipmunk hangs out. And the day we leave this island it's going to the scout that has done the best scout stunt. Tracking, signalling, good turn, cooking, it makes no difference what. The scout that does the *biggest thing,* he gets the cup. We two scoutmasters and Mr. Wade are going to be the committee. Now you'd better all turn in and hurry up about it, and Ralph Gordon is not to snore; they're complaining about it over in town."

"Can we do any kind of stunts we want to?" asked the tall scout whom they call Nick.

"Any kind at all that's good scouting; that's the only rule."

"All right, then I'm going to start to-night,"

said Nick; "I'm going to row across and get that cup out of the car so we all can see it. Let's have the key, will you?"

At this there was a general laugh mingled with shouts from a dozen or so volunteers:

"I'll go with you!"

"Take me?"

"I'm in on that!"

"I was just going to suggest it!"

"Yes you were—not!"

"Wait till morning," said Scoutmaster Ned.

"It can't be done," said Nick in a funny, sober way; "a scout is supposed to have his sleep, that's the most important rule of all, you said so yourself. I can't sleep till I've had a squint at that cup. Come on Fido, let's row over."

The scout called Fido had won his name because of his doglike persistence in following trails. "That's me," he said, "I was just going to propose it when you took the words out of my mouth."

"I'd like to see a photograph of anybody taking anything out of *your* mouth," said Scoutmaster Ned. "Go ahead, the two of you; I wish your people would send you both to a private

school that opens up to-morrow. Go on, get out of here. And don't wake us up when you come back."

"Thank you kindly," said Fido.

"The pleasure is mine," said Scoutmaster Ned.

CHAPTER XVI

FOOTPRINTS

So this, then, was the explanation of the blood-thirsty talk which the mighty hero of the Bridgeboro troop had heard under the buffalo robe as he emerged from the sweet realm of slumber in the automobile.

Pistols, killing, stealing and dead ones! To steal up to a bird and *not* kill it! To wake up if you are a dead one! To laugh with wholesome scout humor at the silly gun play of the screen! To count the pistols in William I. Smart's five reel thriller!

Alas, Scout Harris!

But we are not to accompany that redoubtable rescuer in his thrilling flight. We are going to row across the lake in which the dying camp-fire on the little island cast a golden flicker, into which the oars held by our new acquaintance, Nick Vernon, dipped silently and rose dripping as his

practiced arms drew the boat through the water, causing a musical little ripple at its bow.

"Got the key?" Fido asked.

"Do you suppose I'd come away without it?"

"Pull a little on your left. I can just make out the shed. There isn't,—yes there is, there's just one light in the town."

"That's Algernon Kirkendall studying his algebra," said Nick.

"It's just in line with the shed. Row straight for the light and we'll hit the shore just right. I'll lift this seat and steer with it. Crinkums, it's dark on the water, isn't it?"

So the algebra was of some use in the world after all; Algernon Kirkendall was a scout without knowing it.

"S. N.[1] thinks more of that new car than he does of the troop," said Fido.

"Sure, the car don't give him as much trouble," said Nick. "We're a Hunkajunk troop and Safety First's troop is a Ford troop; it's small but it makes a lot of noise. If I ever start a troop it will be air-cooled. How about it, am I headed right?"

[1] Scoutmaster Ned he meant.

"Row straight ahead, I'll steer."

"Golly, the water's black. Look! Did you see that fish jump? Look around, the camp-fire looks good from here. Believe me, the autumn is the time to camp. We're in luck. I love, I love, I love my lessons, but oh you little island!"

"Ditto."

"We're set till Columbus Day."

"You mean Election Day. Gee, your oar touched bottom, here we are. I'll row back."

They pulled the boat up and started for the shack. Fido reached it first and called excitedly, "It's open! The car's gone!"

"Stop your fooling," called Nick.

"I'm not fooling, come and look for yourself, hurry up, the car's gone."

They stood in the big open doorway in gaping amazement. They walked in, too dumfounded to speak, and when they did speak their voices sounded strange to each other within the dark, empty confines of those old dried board walls.

"Somebody must have broken in through the small door," said Fido.

"It's closed and locked," said his companion. "How about the fastening on the big one?"

"It's all O. K.; nobody's been breaking in, that's sure."

"You don't mean to tell me S. N. would lock the small door and then come away leaving the big one open, do you?" Nick asked incredulously.

"Well, what then?" his comrade retorted with greater incredulity. "If both doors were closed and fastenings are all right now, could anybody get the car out? They left the big door open—that's what they did."

"They never did that," said Nick; "look here, here's a fresh finger print on the door—you can smell the oil on it. Here, wait till I light another match. S. N. did what he always does, he opened the hood and turned on the oil pet-cock and fussed around and then pulled the door shut. Someone must have been inside this place before they got back."

Fido Norton was by this time on his knees outside the larger door. "Here are footprints," said he; "two, three,—here's another one. Give me another match."

"Those were made by our own fellows," said Nick, inspecting the ground, half interested.

"Can't you see they were made by scout shoes? Do you think a boy scout stole the car? Here are some others, too, S. N.'s. and Safety First's, I suppose."

"Why should they step outside the big door?" Norton asked. "These are fresh footprints, all of them. After they got through, they'd go out through the small door wouldn't they? This print, and this one, and this one," he said, holding a match, "were made by scout shoes—*to-night*, not an hour ago."

"All the fellows except us two are in camp," said Nick.

"All right," Fido Norton shot back, "they might all be at the North Pole, but these prints were made by scout shoes *to-night*. That's what I'm telling you."

"All right," said Nick with a tolerant sneer in his voice, "the car was stolen by a boy scout, probably a tenderfoot. Maybe it was stolen by a girl scout—"

"No, they're scout shoe prints," said Norton, ignoring his friend's sarcasm, "and they're not an hour old, not a half hour, that's what I think."

"Well, actions speak louder than footprints," said Nick; "what are we going to do, that's the question?"

"Whatever you say," said Norton cheerfully.

CHAPTER XVII

ACTION

"WELL then I say let's send up a signal," said Nick hurriedly, "the fellows at camp will see it and everybody else for miles around will see it. Every telegraph operator along the railroad can read it. Forget about scouts stealing cars and do what I tell you. Hustle up to the police station and tell them about it so they can't say we didn't report it, then meet me at the town hall."

"What are you going to do?"

"I'm going to use the old search-light if it will work. It hasn't been used since the night of the armistice when they lighted up the flag with it. Climb in through the broken window on the side and come up into the cupola. Don't tell Chief Bungelheimer or he'll say it was his idea. My father's on the town committee, it's all right, hustle now, get the police department off your hands and maybe we can do something—no telling. Remember, the side window, the one that's

broken. And look out for the ladder, it's rotten. Hurry up, beat it!"

Fido Norton hurried to the police station in back of Ezra Corbett's store and aroused Officer Dopeson who was at the desk waiting for out-of-town speeders to be brought in. In a kind of waking dream the officer heard an excited voice shout, "Mr. Ned Garrison's car is stolen from the shed down by the lake."

When Officer Dopeson was fully aware of this noisy intrusion, the intruder had disappeared. He lost no time, however, in setting the usual machinery in motion. By a continuous series of movements of the receiver rack on the telephone he aroused Miss Dolly Bobbitt, the night operator, from the depths of the novel she was reading, and notified the Police Department in East Ketchem across the lake to be on watch for the car. The police department over there said that he would be glad to do that. The police departments of Conner's Junction and Rocky Hollow were also notified.

A long distance call to the New York police warned them to be on the lookout. Blinksboro, on the main road, did not answer. Knapp's

Crossroads had gone to a harvest festival and forgotten to come back. No answer. Lonehaven couldn't get the name of the car but said it would watch out for a Plunkabunk. Wakeville said no car could possibly get through there as there wasn't any road. Miss Dolly Bobbitt returned to her novel.

And meanwhile the scout raised a mighty hand up into the vast, starry heaven, like some giant traffic cop. . . .

"Pull that canvas cover off it," said Nick to his comrade who had just come up the ladder. "The blamed thing's all rotten anyway, I guess. Strike a match and find where the switch is. Look out you don't slip in the hole. Look at all the confetti and stuff," he added hurriedly, as the tiny flame of the match illuminated a small area of the little cupola. "War's over, huh?"

There upon the floor were strewn the gay many-colored little paper particles, plastered against the wood by many a rain, mementos of the night when even West Ketchem arose and poured this festive, fluttering stuff down necks and into windows. Someone who had thought to throw the search-light on the flag across the street, had

spilled some of insinuating stuff in the little cupola. How old and stale, and a part of the forgotten past, the war seemed! And these once gay memorials of its ending were all washed out and as colorless as the big spiders that claimed the little cupola as their own. It smelled musty up there. And whenever a match was lighted the spiders started in their webs. A lonely bat, settled for the winter, hung like an old stiff dishrag from a beam.

"Did you find the switch?" Nick asked, as he fumbled hastily with the big brass light. "All right, wait till I point the lens down, now turn it."

There was no light.

"Did you turn it?"

"Sure."

"Pull it out, maybe it works that way."

There was no light. Norton paused in suspense while Nick shook the brass case and jarred the wiring to overcome a slight short circuit if there was any there.

"All right, turn it again."

There was no light, and the two scouts stood baffled and heavy hearted in the lonely darkness.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE MESSAGE

I'M a dumb-bell!" said Nick in a quick inspiration. "Go down and turn on the main switch; it's in a box on the wall in the vestibule; just pull the handle down and push it in below. We'll never get any juice up here with that turned off. Hurry up."

Norton descended the ladder and with lighted matches found his way to the vestibule where the switch-box was. Here was the big switch on which all other switches in the building depended. As he pulled it down one lonely bulb in the meeting-room brightened and cast a dim light in the musty, empty place. It was evidently the only bulb in which the individual switch was turned on. Norton went through the meeting-room and turned this off. The place smelled for all the world like a school-room.

When he reached the ladder it was bathed in light. Nick was pointing a shaft of dazzling

brightness downward. It revealed spiders and split rungs on the ladder and all the litter at its foot. All the rotting framework of the place and all the disorder were drawn into the light of day. A pile of old law books became radiant, dry and dull as they were.

"We've got it," called Nick, "hurry up, this blamed thing will reach to the isle of Yap. What's S? Wait, I'll give 'em the high sign first."

A long, dusty column swept across the dark sky.

"Attention everybody," said Nick. "What's S?"

"Three dots," said Norton.

"Three flashes it is. How's that? I'm forgetting my A, B, C's. What's T?"

"One dash."

"Is three seconds long enough?"

"Three for dashes and one for dots."

"O."

The long column swung slowly to right, then slowly back to left again, then slowly back to right.

"P's a hard one; here goes."

"Good for you, *some* handwriting."

In five minutes or less, Nick had sprawled across the open page of the heavens the words, "STOP BLUE CAR 50792 EAGLE ON FRONT." He paused about half a minute then repeated the message.

That long, accusing arm crossed stars as it swayed and flashed. It filled the limitless sky like a rainbow. A giant spectre it was, swaying in the unknown depths, crossing clouds, and piercing realms of darkness, and speaking to those who could understand. A sick child, somewhere or other, saw it, and the watchful mother carried the little one to a window the better to see this strange visitant.

"It's a search-light," she said. But to them it had no meaning. A merry party returning home in the wee hours paused and watched it curiously but it spoke to them not. At Knapp's Cross-roads they saw it, just as the harvest festival was breaking up, and Hank Sparker and Sophia Coyson lingered on their way home to watch it. But it spoke not their language.

Did it speak to any one, this voice calling in the dark? Did any one understand it? Were

there no telegraph operators in any of the stations along the line? They would understand. Was there no one?

No one? . . .

CHAPTER XIX

PAGE TWO HUNDRED AND EIGHTY-FOUR

If Pee-wee had stolen a glimpse from under the buffalo robe at about the time that he was writing under difficulties his momentous message to the world, he might have noticed a little old-fashioned house nestling among the trees along the roadside.

At that time the house was dark save for a lamp-light in a little window up under the eaves. Little the speeding hero knew that up in that tiny room there sat a boy engrossed with the only scout companion that he knew, and that was the scout handbook. It had come to him by mail a few days before.

This boy lived with his widowed mother, Mrs. Mehetable Piper. His name was Peter, but whether he was descended from the renowned Peter Piper who picked a peck of pickled peppers the present chronicler does not know. At the time in question he was eating the handbook alive.

The speeding auto passed, the mighty Bridgeboro scout pinned his missive to his remnant of sandwich and hurled it out into the dark world, the boy up in the little room went on reading with hungry eyes, and that is all there was to that.

Peter belonged to no troop, for in that lonely country there was no troop to belong to. He had no scoutmaster, no one to track and stalk and go camping with, no one to jolly him as Pee-wee had. Away off in National Headquarters he was registered as a pioneer scout. He had his certificate, he had his handbook, that is all. It is said in that book that a scout is a brother to every other scout, but this scout's brothers were very far away and he had never seen any of them. He wondered what they looked like in their trim khaki attire. He could hardly hope to see them, but he did dare to hope that somehow or other he might strike up a correspondence with one of them. He had heard of pioneer scouts doing that.

In his loneliness he pictured scouts seated around a camp-fire telling yarns. He knew that sometimes these wonderful and fortunate beings with badges up and down their arms went tracking

in pairs, that there was chumming in the patrols. He might sometime or other induce Abner Corning to become a pioneer scout and chum with him. But this seemed a Utopian vision for Abner lived seven miles away and had hip disease and lived in a wheel-chair.

Peter had a rich uncle who lived in New York and took care of a building and got, oh as much as thirty dollars a week. The next time this rich uncle came to visit he was going to ask him if he had seen any real scouts with khaki suits and jack-knives dangling from their belts and axes hanging on their hips.

Peter experimented with the axe in the woodshed but it was so long that the handle dragged on the ground and he could sit on it. He had likewise pinned a Harding and Coolidge button on his sleeve and pretended it was a signalling badge. *A signalling badge!* He did not tell his mother what he was pretending for she would not understand. Out in the small barn he had presented himself with this, with much scout ceremony, and he had actually trembled when he told himself (in a man's voice) to "step forward and receive this token. . . ."

The car in which Scout Harris was being carried reached the lake and still Peter Piper poured over his scout handbook by the dim, oily smelling lamp, up in that little room. The two scoutmasters rowed across and were greeted by their noisy troops and still Peter Piper read his book. The scout of scouts, W. Harris of the nifty Bridgeboro outfit, was nearly suffocated, then escaped and stood triumphant over the ruins of the West Ketchem school, and still Peter Piper's smarting eyes were fixed upon that book. They were riveted to page two hundred and eighty-four and he was reading the words "Scouts should thoroughly master these two standard. . . ."

He read it again and again for his strained eyes were blinking and the page seemed all hazy. He paused to rest his eyes, then read on. But he did not turn the page. For an hour his gaze was fixed upon it. Just on that one page. . . .

CHAPTER XX

STOP

SUDDENLY something, it seemed like a shadow, crossed the window outside. If Peter's little room had been downstairs he might have thought that a spectre of the night was passing. He looked up, startled, dumbfounded. And while he gazed the tall dusky apparition passed back across the window again.

Half frightened and very curious he raised the little sash and looked out. The night was dark but the sky was filled with stars. Not a light of man's making was there in all the country roundabout. He concentrated his gaze along the back road and tried to pick out the spot where Peace-justice Fee's house was, thinking that perhaps some sign thereabout would furnish the key to this ghostly mystery. But there was not the faintest twinkle there, nor any sound of life. Only solemn, unanswering darkness. Somewhere

in the woods a solitary screech owl was hooting its discordant song.

"Is—is—anybody here?" Peter asked, his voice shaking. There was no answer, nothing but silent, enveloping darkness.

Peter groped behind him for the old piece of broomstick which propped the window open, and with this in place, he leaned far out and gazed toward the little graveyard where his father and his grandfather and all the simple forbears of the lonely neighborhood had gone to their rest. Not a sound was there in that solemn little acre. He strained his eyes and tried to identify the place by Deacon Small's tall, white tombstone, but he could not make it out.

Suddenly, just above that silent, hallowed little area, a tall gray thing appeared, then disappeared as suddenly.

Peter trembled, yet gazed in fascination. He was fearful of he knew not what. Yet he could not withdraw his eyes from that spot. Had someone—some *thing* from that little graveyard come to his window and gone back again to its musty rest? Was it—*could* it be—?

Hardly had he the chance to think and conjure

up some harrowing fear, when the dusky column appeared again, then disappeared, then appeared again. Then darkness.

Whatever put it into Peter Piper's head he never know, but quick like those very flashes occurred to him the very words that he had been saying over and over to himself but a few minutes before—saying over and committing to memory. "Three dots or flashes—S, three dots or flashes—S, three dots or flashes——"

Again it arose, that ghostly apparition, and filled the dark sky above the little graveyard. This time it remained for one, two, three, four seconds.

Peter's hand trembled now from a new kind of excitement, as he groped behind him for his one poor scout possession, the handbook. Then he reached for the lamp, but the night wind blew it out just as the tall thing came again, and stayed for several seconds.

Peter groped for the little box of safety matches which always lay near the lamp. These were the chief ornaments of his little room, the lamp and the safety matches. He held a match close over page two hundred and eighty-four

while he divided his gaze between this and the next lingering visitation of that strange, long, shadowy thing over the graveyard. He struck match after match, as each blew out. Yes, that was what three short flashes meant—S. And one long flash meant T.

Suppose—*suppose* there should be three *long* appearances now? That would be O. Were these signs, expressed in ghostly strangeness, just the figments of Peter's excited imagination? Just the Morse Code haunting him and coloring his fancy? He put his finger on the black symbol on the page and waited.

—Two—three— then a pause.

S—T—O

His finger held upon the page trembled as he lighted another match and still another and moved his finger to another printed symbol on the page. And the long, dusty column over beyond the graveyard, came and went, now for a second, now for several, now for several again, then for one short second.

"STOP!" said Peter, his voice shaking as if indeed some ghostly spectre were upon him. Somebody, somebody was talking to him! Some

scout, in real khaki attire, out in the great world?

Peter did not know where to place his waiting finger next. A mighty hand had been raised in the black, solemn night, and had said *Stop.* Had sprawled it across the open page of the heaven. Peter waited, as one waits for a spirit to give some sign. He kept his eyes riveted upon the general service code, lighting match after match and throwing them on the floor as the fickle things went out. Some day, *some day, maybe,* Peter would have a *real* flashlight with a switch button, a flashlight of shiny nickel that he could polish, such a flashlight as he had seen a picture of in *Boy's Life.* A flashlight that would not blow out. Sometime he would—maybe. . . .

CHAPTER XXI

SEEIN' THINGS

STOP-blue-car-five-o-seven-nine-two-eagle-on-front.

Out of the solemn darkness, someone, somewhere, had called to Peter Piper of Piper's Crossroads; had stolen like a silent ghost to his little window and bidden him watch.

Far away that arresting voice may have been, away off in the big world, and none could say how far or near, or where or how it spoke, calling in the endless wilderness of night. But it spoke to Peter Piper, of Piper's Crossroads, to Peter Piper, pioneer scout.

And Peter Piper, with the aid of the only scout companion that he had, read it and was *prepared*, as it is the way of a scout to be.

He did not dare to hope that he was being drawn into the actual circle of scouting; he would not know how to act among those natty strangers. Wonderful as they were, with their pathfinding

and all that, they could hardly penetrate to his humble, sequestered little home. Peter Piper of Piper's Crossroads was not going to allow himself to dream any extravagantly impossible dreams. The nickel flashlight and a correspondence with some unknown "brother," that was as far as his hopes carried.

He had still a lingering and persistent feeling that this whole amazing business was unreal; that he had been dreaming it or at least reading a meaning where there was none. He knew that he could see trees and the stars in Hawley's pond when there were none there. Might not this be the same? He had expected sometime or other to make a signal fire and give this scout voice a try-out with some simple word. He had not expected to be aroused and called to service by its spectral, mysterious command.

What should he do? Set it down to his own deceiving fancy and go back to his handbook? Return to the wholesome realities of stalking and trailing which filled those engrossing pages? Poor Peter Piper felt that he had made a sort of bold excursion from Piper's Crossroads into the realm of miracles and that he had better not let

that weird apparition over beyond the graveyard dupe and mock him. Perhaps he had been "seein' things." Yet there were the long and short flashes and they had spelled that warning message, or else he had gone out of his senses or been dreaming. He hardly knew what to think, now that he had time to think.

His credulity soon gained the upper hand, he began to doubt his own eyes, and he was just a bit ashamed of what he was resolved to do. At all events he would have the delight of doing it, and no one would know. He would act just as a *real* scout would *really* act if the message was *real* and *true*.

Stealing down the creaky, boxed-in stairs, he got a lantern from the kitchen and lighted it. The actual performance of this practical act made his experience of the last few minutes seem fanciful, unreal. He was no longer under the spell of that ghostly column and he was not so sure that he believed in it. To bestir himself upon the authority of such an uncanny warning seemed rather foolish. He almost found it easier, now, to believe that he had seen some spectral thing in the graveyard

As he emerged from the house the familiar things about him seemed to mock his vision of a warning message in the sky. The startled chickens in the little hen-house resettled themselves comfortably on their perches as if not to be disturbed by such nonsense. The calf resting at the end of his pegged rope arose, looked about him and lay down again as if he would not be a party to poor Peter's absurd nocturnal enterprise. The darkness and the vastness of the wooded country seemed to chill Peter's hopes. Now that the gripping spell was over he hardly knew what to think. . . .

With his jack-knife he cut a piece from the rope which held the calf and moved the peg nearer to the animal which looked curiously on at this unexpected abridgment of its sphere of freedom. It almost seemed to Peter that the calf was laughing at him.

This piece of rope he stretched across the road, fastening one end to the rotten gate-post, long deserted by its gate, the other to a tree. Then he hung the lantern midway of this line. This seemed as much as his waning hope justified, but on second thought he stole into the

house, took a black tomato crate marker from the kitchen shelf and on a paper flour-bag printed the words DANGER ROAD CLOSED. This he hung upon the rope near the lantern. Then he sat down on the old carriage block where they used to stand the milk cans and waited. He felt rather foolish waiting there and he wondered what he should do if a big car with the number 50792 and an eagle on it should really come along. . . .

The night was pitch dark; somewhere in the lonely woods hard by the screech owl was still calling, and the brisk autumn wind, freshening as the night advanced into the wee hours, conjured up strange noises in the loose hanging sticks of the old ramshackle fence along the roadside. Dried leaves, driven by the fitful gusts of wind, sounded like someone, or some *thing,* hurrying by.

Now, indeed, Peter's fine hopes melted away as he waited there in the darkness. To be sure, this was a main road, as likely a route as any thereabouts for autos, and in the daytime many passed there. But as he waited now in the deep, enveloping night, and heard no sound save the

haunting voices caused by the wind and the low, monotonous singing of the forest life, it seemed unthinkable that any thrilling sequel of his singular experience in his little room could occur. Everything was the same as usual, the crickets chirping, the owl calling, the little graveyard down the road wrapped in darkness. . . . . Glory was not going to knock on the humble door of Peter Piper of Piper's Crossroads. . . .

Peter glanced down the dark road toward the graveyard; he had always hurried past that spot when coming home from the crossroads at night. Once he had seen a ghostly figure on the stone wall, which, on more careful inspection the next morning, proved to be the sexton's shovel with his hat on top of it. The little church was around the bend of the road, within the hallowed acre.

Suddenly, as Peter glanced in the direction where the old leaning gravestones were wrapped in darkness, he saw something which harrowed his very soul and made his blood run cold. One of those stones was bathed in a dim, shadowy light. It was startling to see just one stone and no others. It was not a light so much as an area of gossamer brightness that enveloped it, a kind

of gauze shroud. Peter gazed, unable to stir, his breaths coming short and fast. Then this dim shroud left the tombstone and glided slowly through the graveyard, shedding its hovering brightness upon a small area of the stone wall as it crossed, and came steadily, steadily over toward Peter Piper.

CHAPTER XXII

HARK! THE CONQUERING HERO COMES

"WHAT the dickens is this, anyway; a cemetery?" said Mr. Swiper, poking the finding light this way and that as the car of a thousand delights came slowly up toward the bend. "It's some rocky road to Dublin, all right."

He cast the light along the dark road behind them and looked apprehensively back as far as he could see. Evidently there was no cause for fear there and he dropped the car of a thousand delights into second gear and picked his way along the narrow, rocky way, below the bend. "I guess it will be better when we get around here," he said; "we have to watch our step in this jungle. Nice place to build a church, huh?" He threw the finding light upon the little edifice ahead and brightened the small stained-glass window, casting a soft reflection upon Deacon Small's slanting marble slab nearby.

The small figure in a gray sweater with a

rather tough look, cap drawn over his round face, who sat huddled up alongside the driver seemed not to partake of the delights which the big car claimed to furnish. He seemed chilled and very much worried. He looked wistfully ahead at the graveyard where the strange, soft, reflected light shone.

"The people around here haven't got any 'phones," he said. "Anyways what's the use 'phoning Mr. Bartlett because he'll only be in bed. If we're going straight to Bridgeboro, gee whiz, what's the good of 'phoning? What's the use waking people up around here, even if they have got 'phones? Gee whiz, you're acting awful funny. Why didn't you ask me to 'phone when we were passing through a village?"

"You're going to get out and 'phone when I tell you to; see?" said our friend, the manual training teacher. "And you ain't going to give me no sass neither, understand? I don't let kids tell me my business."

"You just want to get rid of me, that's what," said Pee-wee. "Gee, you might as well say what you mean, I'm not scared."

"Oh, ain't you? Well you do as I tell you and

you'll be all right. You do as I tell you if you want to get a ride home; see? Mr. Bartlett and me are grown-up men, we are, and we know what's the right way to do. When a kid is told to do something he's gotter do it. You know so much about them scout kids; don't you know that?

"I'll take care of this here car of Mr. Bartlett's. The next house we come to I'm going to stop and let you out a little way past it and you're going to show what you can do; you're going to go back and 'phone to tell Mr. Bartlett we're on our way, and I'll wait for you."

"You wanted me to do that at a house that was empty and where there wasn't any 'phone; I could tell because there weren't any wires. Do you think scouts can't see things? You just want to get rid of me, that's all. You want to get rid of me where there aren't any 'phones or people or anything. Gee, maybe I'm not as strong as you, but anyway I know what you're up to, that's one sure thing."

"Are you going to do as I tell you?"

"I'm a scout and I'm not going to get out till you put me out, so there."

Slowly the big car moved up the rocky hill and

around the bend and the finding light which had been focused on the church shifted its area of distant brightness until Mr. Swiper turned it off just as the two big headlights threw their glare along the straight level road.

The small figure in the shabby gray sweater and tough looking cap was nervous and apprehensive and angry with a righteous anger. But he did not tremble like the poor little lonely figure waiting in the darkness with eyes fixed upon those two dazzling, glaring eyes. Five-o-seven-nine-two. There it is, Peter; read it again as the car draws nearer to make sure. Yes, that is a *five*. Five-o-seven-nine-two. Don't you see the little gilt eagle on the radiator? He trembled, oh how he trembled.

"Looker here, you kid," said the driver to the huddled up figure beside him; "I once croaked a boy scout that didn't do what I told him. Do you see? I *croaked* him. No scout kid can put anything over on me; I won't have any kids interfering with my plans—"

Oh yes you will, Mr. Swiper. You may have escaped from jail, the authorities of a dozen states may be after you. But just the same you

are going to stop when a little trembling pioneer scout in homespun pantaloons tells you to. Look ahead, where that dim light is, Mr. Swiper, with the cropped hair. Do you see something shining there, held in a little trembling hand? That is a knife, Mr. Swiper. The trembling hand that holds that knife belongs to a soul possessed, Mr. Swiper. He is crazed with a high resolve. See how he shakes? Oh he is not thinking of *you*. He is thinking of the car, Mr. Swiper. He is not himself at all and he is going to slash your tires if you pass that rope, Mr. Swiper. So you see?

For it is said that opportunity knocks once at everyone's door, Mr. Swiper. It came to you on the ruins of that old school. And it has come away down here, Mr. Swiper, and knocked on the door of Peter Piper, pioneer scout, of Piper's Crossroads.

CHAPTER XXIII

PETER FINDS A WAY

"WHAT's all this?" asked Mr. Swiper, as the car came to a stop before the rope.

With hand shaking and heart thumping, but borne up by a towering resolve, Peter took his stand beside one of the front wheels. "The—the road is—it's closed," he said, his voice trembling. The hand which held the knife stole below the shiny mud-guard and rested on the smooth, unyielding rubber. "The road is closed," he repeated.

Mr. Swiper climbed down out of the car, muttering an oath. He looked apprehensively back along the road and being sure of no danger there he crossed the rope and advanced a few yards along the road to inspect it.

Peter was in the grip of terrible fear, fear at his own boldness. His whole form trembled. He did not stop to think, he knew that if he were going to do anything effectual it must be in those

few brief moments. There are many ways to cripple an auto without damaging it, but Peter knew nothing of autos except that they went by gasoline.

In an emergency he would have slashed a tire even while the machine moved. Now that he had a little time in which to think he hurried behind the auto and crawling beneath it turned on the outlet of the gas tank. He knew that the tank was in back and that there must be a pipe leading from it. He had intended to wrench the thin pipe away, when his groping, trembling fingers stumbled on the outlet cock. This he turned on with as much terror as if he were setting fire to the universe.

Aghast at his own inspiration and boldness, he stood behind the car, shaking all over, as he heard the precious fuel running away in a steady stream and pattering on the road. Well, he would take the consequences of this decisive act. From the moment he had seen those glaring headlights and realized that he was participating in a reality, he had been frantic, wondering what to do. Well, now he had "gone and done it"

and he was terror-stricken at his own act. The mere wasting of so much gasoline was a terrible thing in the homely life of poor Peter.

He paused behind the car listening. He had not the courage to go forward. He listened as the liquid fuel flowed away and trickled over the spare tire-rack, and his beating heart seemed to keep time with it.

Ah, you Hunkajunk touring model with all your thousand delights, you cannot get along without this trickling liquid any better than your lowly brother, the humble Ford. Would *all* of it flow away before that terrible man came back?

Now Peter heard voices in front of the car; the man had returned, and was speaking to his confederate, his pal.

"I won't get out of the car and I won't desert it," he heard the small stranger announce sturdily.

"Didn't you say you were with me?"

"I did, but I——"

"Then shut up. The road's all right; there's nothing the matter with it; this is some kind of a frame-up. Did you come along this way when

you copped it before; I mean you and that pair?"

"I don't know, I was under the buffalo robe."

They were thieves all right; Peter knew it now. And his assurance on this point gave him courage. The strangers would be no safer to deal with, but at least Peter knew now that he had the right on his side. In a sudden burst of impulsive resolution he stepped around and in a spirit of utter recklessness spoke up. His own voice sounded strange to him.

"I—I know what you are—you're thieves," he said. "I can—I can tell by the way you talk—and—and you—you can't take the car—even an inch you can't—because all the gasoline is gone out of it and I did it and I don't care—and you—you can *kill* me if you want to only you can't take the car. And—and—pretty soon Ham Sanders will be along with the milk cans and he's not afraid of you—"

"What did you say about ham?" Pee-wee shouted down at him.

"Ham Sanders," Peter called back defiantly.

"I though you said ham sandwich," Pee-wee retorted.

"He can—he's even—he can even handle a

bull," shouted Peter, carried away by excitement. "All the—the—gasoline is gone—it is—because now I can hear it stop dripping—so—now—*now* what are you going to do? So?"

CHAPTER XXIV

DESERTED

MR. SWIPER lost no time upon hearing Peter's startling announcement. Rushing to the back of the car he confirmed the information by a frantically hurried inspection, keeping up a running fire of curses the while. For a manual training teacher he was singularly profane.

Nor did he tarry to administer any corporeal rebukes, more than to send poor Peter reeling as he brushed him aside with imprecations in his flight. Since the auto had been so generously handed to him by a kind boy scout, perhaps the loss of it was not such a shock as it might otherwise have been. There were other autos.

Mr. Swiper saved himself and that was his chief concern. He was not going to take any chances with Ham Sanders. In the last few miles of their inglorious journey, Pee-wee had been trouble enough to him and how to get rid

of that redoubtable youngster had been a question. So Mr. Swiper paused not to make an issue of Peter Piper's audacious act. He withdrew into the shelter of the woods and in the fullness of time to the more secure shelter of an Illinois penitentiary where he was entered under the name of Chick Swiper, alias Chick the Speeder, alias Chick the Gent, alias the Car King, alias Jack Skidder—perhaps because he was so slippery.

In his official pedigree there was nothing about his being a manual training teacher, though he must have had some knowledge of the use of tools for he removed the bars from his cell window with praiseworthy skill, and was later caught in Michigan, I think.

So there sat Pee-wee glaring down upon Peter, still frightened at himself for the stir that he had made in the great world.

"You foiled him," said Pee-wee. "Do you know what? He was a thief; he was stealing this auto."

"Yes, and you're a thief too," said Peter, removing the lantern from the rope and holding it up toward the auto. He was quite brave and

collected now. "And if you want to run you'd better do it before anybody comes, that's what I'll tell you. You're—you're dressed up just like a thief; I can tell. Anyway, you can't take the auto."

"Do you call me a thief?" shouted Pee-wee. "That shows how much you know; I'm a boy scout. Do you think scouts steal things? That shows how much you know about logic."

"You're a thief, you can't fool me," Peter retorted courageously. "Look at the way you look. I'm not scared of you, either—or him either."

"How can I look at the way I look?" Pee-wee fairly screamed at him. "You're crazy! I told him where it was and I told him—"

"That shows you're just as bad as he is," Peter insisted. "Are you going to stay here till Ham Sanders comes and be arrested? Anyhow, you're arrested now," he ventured, "and you have to wait."

"You tell me I'm arrested?" Pee-wee yelled. "When I'm taking this car back to its owner? Do you know what a boy scout is?"

"I know what they look like, they're all

dressed up in uniforms," poor Peter said, "but you can be one without that."

"Now you see, you said so yourself," Pee-wee began.

"But they don't get dressed like thieves," Peter retorted.

"I'm on your side because you stopped him," shouted Scout Harris.

"I don't want you on my side," said Peter. "I'm a scout and I don't want any—any—robbers on my side."

"You?" said Pee-wee.

"Yes, me."

"I bet you don't even know—I bet you don't even know—how many—how many—"

"That shows you don't know anything about scouts at all," said Peter. "I've got a book that tells all about it and when a man comes you're going to get arrested."

"Me arrested?"

"Yes you—you helped him to steal it and I don't believe anything you say and you needn't think you can fool me. If you were a scout you wouldn't be scared to run away in the woods now."

"I've been—I've been—I—you're crazy," shouted Pee-wee, fairly bursting with indignation. "I—I've been lost in the woods more times than you have."

"Scouts don't get lost," said Peter.

"They get lost so they can find their way," Pee-wee yelled. "That shows how much you know. If scouts didn't get lost how could scouts rescue them? You *have* to get lost. The same as you have to get nearly drowned. Do you want me to start a fire without a match? That'll show you I'm a scout—only I'd have to have a certain kind of a stone. I can—I can eat a potato from a stick without it going round; that'll prove it. Have you got a roasted potato?"

"No, and I wouldn't give one to a feller that steals automobiles either," said Peter. "I got a signal and I stopped you."

"I know all about signalling and you didn't get one either," Pee-wee shouted in desperation; "I know all about everything about scouting. I know—I know—I can prove I can drink out of a spring without the water going up my nose, so

that's a test. I had a lot of adventures to-night, I was with thieves, and I'll tell you all—"

"I know you were," said Peter, "and you needn't tell me about it because I can tell by looking at you. Do you think you can make me think you own this car, and—and get roasted potatoes from me too, and run away when I show you where the spring is so you can prove it?"

"The man that owns this car is a friend of mine and he—he gave me a quarter—"

"You're a thief and I don't care what you say," said Peter, his agitation rising with his anger, "and it's miles and miles to a village and there's nothing but woods—"

"Scouts can eat moss, they can," Pee-wee interrupted.

"And you can't fool me," Peter continued.

"I'll go scout pace for you," Pee-wee said with a sudden inspiration—

"Yes, you'll go scout pacing away—"

"Will you let me speak?" Pee-wee fairly screeched.

"No, I won't. You're a robber and now you're caught and it serves you right because you

didn't find out about the scouts and join them and have fun that way and then you wouldn't have to go to jail for stealing."

W. Harris, mascot of the Raven Patrol, First Bridgeboro Troop, looked down with withering scorn upon this shabby advocate of scouting. And Peter Piper returned the look fearfully, yet bravely. After the tremendous thing he had done he was not going to be fooled by this hoodlum crook who seemed to have haphazard knowledge of those wonderful, far-off beings in natty khaki and shining things hanging from their belts. He would not even discuss those misty, unknown comrades with this lawbreaker. Anybody might learn a little about the scouts, even a thief.

"You don't know anything about them," he said, holding up his head as if proudly claiming brotherhood with those distant heroes in their rich, wonderful attire; "I won't talk about them. Because I know about them even—even if they don't know *me*. They sent me a message; they didn't know, but they did it just the same. So I belong too. You can make believe you have a

uniform—you can. You can be miles and miles and miles and miles——"

He paused and listened. Down the road, in the still night, sounded the gentle melody of clanking milk cans mingled with the pensive strains of loose and squeaking wheels. It was the melodious orchestra which always heralded the approach of Ham Sanders who was so strong that he could handle a bull.

"Do you think I'm scared?" said Pee-wee.

Evidently he was not.

CHAPTER XXV

BEDLAM

THAT Pee-wee Harris, the only original boy scout, positively guaranteed, should be pronounced *not* a scout! Why that was like saying that water was not wet or (to use a more fitting comparison) that mince pie was not good.

To say that Pee-wee Harris was in the scouts would not be saying enough. Rather should it be said that the scouts were all in Pee-wee Harris. The Scout movement had not swallowed *him,* he had swallowed it, the same as he swallowed everything else. He had swallowed it whole. He was the boy scout just as much as Uncle Sam is the United States, except that he was much greater and more terrible than Uncle Sam. Oh, much. He was just as much a boy scout as the Fourth of July is a noise. Except that he was more of a noise.

And here was a shabby, eager-faced boy, with pantaloons like stovepipes almost reaching his

ankles and a ticking shirt with a pattern like a checker-board; a quaint, queer youngster, living a million miles from nowhere, telling him that he was no scout, that he was a thief.

"Hey, mister," Pee-wee shouted to Ham Sanders who drove up, "I'm rescuing this automobile from two men that stole it and I got another one to help me and he was trying to steal it and it belongs to a man I know where I live and I was at the movies with him, and that feller said he'd take it back and this feller says I'm a thief and I'm good and hungry."

Ham Sanders gave one look at him and said, "Oh, is that so?"

"It's more than so," Pee-wee shouted, "and I'm going to stick to this automobile, I don't care what. If you say I'm not a scout I can prove it."

"You needn't go far to prove it," said Ham; "we can see you're not. Maybe you're pretty wide awake—"

"I'm not, I'm sleepy," Pee-wee shouted. "Have you got anything to say around here?"

"Well, I *think* I have, I'm constable," said Ham.

"Then why aren't you sure?" Pee-wee re-

torted. "Just because I don't know where I am it doesn't say I don't know what I'm talking about, does it? Will you help me drive this automobile back? You'll get some money if you do. I had an adventure with a couple of thieves and I foiled them; they've got seventy pistols. I was watching The Bandit of Harrowing Highway—"

"You got into bad company, youngster," said Ham, surveying Pee-wee's rakish cap and lawless looking sweater. "You ought to be thankful you got a chance to get rid of that sort o' company. You're kinder young, I reckon, ain't you? Gosh, I calculate you ain't more'n four foot high. Kinder young to be mixed up in stealings."

"You're the one that's mixed up, " Pee-wee shouted, "and anyway size doesn't count. You can—you can steal things if you're—you're only a foot high—if you want to and—"

"How about all this, Peter?" asked his friend confidentially.

"I'll tell you," Pee-wee shouted; "I had a lot of adventures, I know two men that have, *shh,* they have *dead ones to their credit!* I circum—what d'you call it—vented them, and that man that just ran away, he was a traitor, but I can—"

"Can you keep still a second? One look at you is enough," said Ham Sanders.

"I've—I've got—three scout suits," Pee-wee began.

"Like enough you stole 'em," said Ham. "You're one of them runners for crooks, that's what you are. I know the kind; they have you to climb in the windows for 'em and all that. Now you keep still a minute if you know what's best for you."

In a brief and threatened few moments of silence Peter told in a whisper how he had seen the signal and read it and stopped the car, and of the flight of the head thief, as he called him. Between these two excited youngsters Ham hardly knew what to believe. He certainly did not believe in talking lights appearing over graveyards. Nor did he credit Pee-wee's vehement and choppy account of bandits with seventy pistols.

"Whar are these here dead ones?" he asked, rather confused. "Over yonder in the graveyard?"

"How do I know where they are?" Pee-wee shouted. "Do you know what blackjacks are?"

"Dots and dashes, you can do it with lights too," said Peter; "they tell the truth. If he says signals lie that shows he isn't a scout anyway, and anybody can see he isn't. I stopped them, I did it by myself."

"That's nothing," Pee-wee shouted from the seat, "I nearly got suffocated, I'm more of a hero than you are. That man that ran away he—he —*duped* me. This car—will you listen—this car—"

"It's stolen; *I* know," said Peter.

"It *was* stolen but it *isn't* stolen," Pee-wee fairly screamed. "Can't a thing be stolen and then not stolen? It's being—being rescued—"

"It's being stolen, the other thief ran away," Peter persisted. "He—he admits he was friends with a thief! He's a thief too, he is,"

"Maybe Jim disguised—kind of—as a thief," Pee-wee conceded.

"He's trying to be disguised as a scout," poor Peter said.

"I was a scout before you or anybody else was born," Pee-wee shouted.

"He isn't," said Peter.

"I am," said Pee-wee.

Ham Sanders scratched his head, looking from one to the other, then looked appealingly at his familiar milk cans. Perhaps he expected to see them dancing around in this Bedlam.

"I'm gonter hev both of you youngsters before the peace justice," he finally said; "we'll soon find out what's wrong here. Climb down out o' that car, you, and come along with me, the both of you."

"Do you think I'm scared of him?" Pee-wee demanded as he climbed down.

"You *will* be scared of him, he's got a big book," said Peter.

"I ain't scared of big books," Pee-wee announced; "I know bigger books, camp registers; I bet it isn't as big as a map book."

"You'll see," said Peter, darkly.

CHAPTER XXVI

THE CULPRIT AT THE BAR

THE book could not have been so very big, for Justice of the Peace Fee lived in a very small house. It was almost concealed among trees fifty yards or so up the road.

Justice Fee was one of those shrewd, easy-going, stern but good-natured, lawyers that one meets away off in the country. He was altogether removed from that obnoxious thing, the small town lawyer. Up in the edge of his gray hair rested a pair of spectacles, with octagon shaped lenses, almost completely camouflaged by his grizzled locks. These spectacles were seldom where they belonged, on his nose.

Apparently he wore them to bed, for after several minutes of knocking by the visitors, he appeared with them on, the while groping for the sleeve of an old coat he had partly donned. He took the callers into a room with a desk in

the middle of it and sat down at this, facing them, his legs sticking out through the space in the middle. Then he opened the large book as if making ready to close somebody up in it as one presses a flower.

He contemplated Pee-wee with a rather curious frown as he listened to what Ham and then Peter (greatly agitated) had to say.

Our young hero, indeed, presented anything but a creditable picture. The old gray sweater used by the man who took care of the furnace in Pee-wee's home, the cap which he held, and his grimy face, made him look like a terrible example of hoodlumism; a trolley-car hoodlum, an apple-stealing and stone-throwing and hooky-playing hoodlum; a hole-in-the-ball-field-fence hoodlum. Nor did the terrible scowl with which he now challenged fate and the world help to make him look like the boy on the cover of the scout manual; the boy that Peter knew and worshipped.

"Well now," drawled Peace Justice Fee, casting a tolerant side glance at Pee-wee, "you tell me this whole business and you tell me the *plain truth*. See?"

"Sure I will," Pee-wee said; "I'll tell you all my adventures—"

"Never mind about your adventures, and watch out, because the first lie you tell—" The justice held up a warning finger. "Now answer me this, never mind anything else; we'll drop a plumb-line right down to the bottom of this thing and have no beating round the bush—"

"I beat lots of bushes for rabbits," Pee-wee vociferated.

"Well, don't beat any here. Now" (the justice spoke slowly and emphatically, shaking a long finger with each word), *"who—owns—that—car?* Careful now."

"Mr. Bartlett, where I live—in Bridgeboro."

"Sure of that?"

"Sure I'm sure; didn't I—"

"Never mind what you did. Now what's this Mr. Bartlett's full name? Now—*now!*" he added warningly, "just you answer the question I ask you and leave the rest to me. If you tell the truth you won't get in any trouble."

Pee-wee, somewhat awed, at last subsided. "Mr. James Bartlett," he said.

Without another word, Mr. Fee drew in his long legs, arose, went over to where a book was hanging, looked in it, then took the receiver from the old-fashioned box telephone on the wall. The party waited, greatly awed by this show of calm efficiency, and ability to get right at the heart of the matter. Pee-wee was particularly elated, for presently his identity and whereabouts would be established and explained. He listened, with growing interest as the justice, unperturbed by delays and mistakes, finally succeeded in securing the desired number.

"This two-four-eight-Bridgeboro?" Pee-wee heard. "Sorry to get you up at this hour. You Mr. James Bartlett? Yes. This is the peace justice at—What? I say this is the peace justice—peace—yes this is the peace justice—*justice of the peace*—at Piper's Crossroads, Noo York State. What? Yes. Noo York State. Pipes? No *Piper's*—Piper's Crossroads. Was your automobile stolen? Your automobile. What? I say was your auto—"

"Sure it was stolen," Pee-wee said; "you just mention—"

"Keep still. I say—was your automobile

stolen—*STOLEN?* Well, it's for your sake—what's that? All right."

There followed a pause. Justice Fee waited but did not address the company. A dead silence reigned. They could hear the ticking of the big grandfather's clock in the corner. Peter thought that signalling was better than this. Ham thought how wonderful it was for a man to have so much "book learning" that he could go right to the heart of a matter like this. Pee-wee thought how, in about ten seconds, he would be able to denounce these strangers, and appear as the real hero that he was. He would ignore Peter Piper entirely and give Justice Fee an edifying lecture on scouting. In about ten seconds they would all see. . . .

"What's that?" said the justice, busy at the 'phone. "Your car is in your garage? I say—what's that? Oh, you looked? Sure about that, eh? Yes—yes—yes. You haven't got two cars? Six cars? Oh, six cylinders. No—no . . . . It's all safe in your garage, you say? Yes. Well, sorry to trouble you. No, not at all. Yes. All right. Good-bye."

Peter Piper looked at Pee-wee with a kind of

awe. He had seen the other thief escape in the darkness; everything had been exciting and confused. But now, in the lamplight and within the safety of those four walls he beheld a real crook, caught, cornered, at bay.

Justice Fee had simplified the whole thing, talking little, depending on hard, cold facts. He had hit the vital spot of the whole mysterious business. He had caught this little hoodlum satellite of thieves in an ugly lie. Yet Peter Piper, who had in him the makings of a real scout, was not happy. He had thought that he would be happy, but now he was not.

"If—if you'll—maybe—if I could take him to my house," he began, twitching his fingers nervously as he gazed wistfully at the Justice who embodied the relentless law, "if you'd let me do that he couldn't run away, it's so far, and he said he was hungry and—and anyway there isn't anything to steal at my house."

That was better than reading the signal. And Peter Piper, pioneer scout of Piper's Crossroads was a better scout than he knew. . . .

CHAPTER XXVII

SOME NOISE

THERE was one place where the searchlight message was translated with a readier skill than at Piper's Crossroads, and where it created quite as great consternation. That was at the camp on Frying-pan Island. It was like A.B.C. to half a dozen of those practiced scouts, and to others not so well practiced, for the skill of the sender had made the reading easy. In less than a minute the camp was the scene of hurried talk and lightning preparation.

"What do you know about that?" asked Sparrow Blake. He was in the Mammoth Patrol, made up of the smaller scouts in Safety First's troop.

"I don't know *anything* about it," said Scoutmaster Ned, reaching for his plaited khaki jacket; "I don't know any more about it than you do. Nobody could get in that place, so I don't see how anyone could get out. Come

ahead, Bill," he added hastily, addressing the other scoutmaster. This was followed by a vociferous chorus.

"Can I go?"

"I'm with you."

"I'll row."

"No you won't, *I* will."

"You mean me."

"Get from under and go back to bed," said Scoutmaster Ned, excitedly. "What do you fellows think this is; a regatta?"

"Aren't we going to chase them?"

"You're going to chase yourselves. Do you think we've got a battleship? We've only got one of the boats here. Chuck me that leather case—"

"Your pistol?"

"Never you mind what's in it. Come ahead, Bill, and you Norris, and look out you don't step in the soup bucket. Is there a light over on shore?"

"Sure, they've got a lantern; trust Nick not to forget anything."

"I'm going so as to carry the lantern."

"Yes, you're not," said Scoutmaster Ned;

"never mind your coat, Bill, come ahead. I hope they had sense enough to get hold of a machine somewhere. They could get Barney's flivver."

"Shall we signal over to them?" called a dozen excited voices.

"No, there isn't time. Come on now, *hustle,* and the rest of you go to sleep."

"While you're chasing thieves? Did you hear what he said? Go to sleep! Can you beat that, from a scoutmaster! And him always telling us to be wide awake."

"Get out of the way, all of you," said Scoutmaster Bill, alias Safety First. "You're like a lot of mosquitoes."

The whole camp followed the two scoutmasters and Norris to the shore, where there seemed likely to be a stampede for the one small boat.

"If you're going to take Norris—"

"Norris can drive the other car back if I get mine," interrupted Scoutmaster Ned. "He has a license; now are you all satisfied?"

They saw that under his persistent good nature he was worried and preoccupied, and like the good scouts they were, they said no more about

going. They knew the pride he took in his Hunkajunk auto. They knew that his one thought was of that now.

Yet Scoutmaster Ned Garrison's sense of humor was ever ready, even in anxiety or disappointment. It was that which endeared him to his troop, whom he was forever denouncing and contemplating with a kind of mock despair. He called them an infernal rabble and they loved him for it. He was a new kind of a scoutmaster. And I honestly believe that when Scoutmaster Ned thrust that leather case containing his revolver down into his pocket, if he could only have known that it was for the purpose of shooting Pee-wee Harris, he would have laughed so hard that he would have capsized the rowboat.

CHAPTER XXVIII

ON THE TRAIL

THE boat glided swiftly through the dark water.

"Nick will get the silver cup for that stunt," said Norris.

"He'll get a punch in the eye if he doesn't have a car for us," said Scoutmaster Ned.

"I wonder how he did."

"Town hall," said Scoutmaster Ned; "that kid thinks quick. If he'd only learn to tie a knot he'd be a scout. Vernon's a pretty good kid, though; he's better than Mount Vernon anyway. Pull on your left a little, Bill. What's the matter; got the sleeping sickness? Pull straight for that light."

"If that wasn't a stunt, what is?" said Norris.

"You are," said Scoutmaster Ned. "We're not handing out silver cups to-night. Maybe I'll do a stunt to-night and win it."

"You?"

"Yes, me. Pull on your left some more. What do you think this is, Bill; a merry-go-round? Now go straight."

"Maybe Fido Norton found their prints," said Norris. "He's a bear at that."

"He's clumsier than a bear, like all Safety First's troop. How about that, Safety? Come on—*quick!* Row!"

"Coming?" called a voice from the shore.

"That's what," answered Scoutmaster Ned.

"Your car's gone."

"So I read in the sky. Somebody break in?"

"The small door's locked, the big one was open but nothing broken."

"Get out!"

"Wait till you see. Who's there?"

"Safety First and Norris and me? You didn't think to get a car, did you? Do you know which way they went?"

"Jim Burton is here with his Packard."

"Hello, Jim."

"Hello, Ned."

"They followed the main road past the east road. We tracked the tires past Oppie's mill.

They're not likely to turn out anywhere else, till they get past Piper's anyway."

"You'll be a scout yet, Fido," called Scoutmaster Ned.

"What did they do, wake you up?" said Safety First as they pulled the boat up on shore.

"I should think they did," said Jim Burton; "they rang the bell a hundred times and went out into the garage and tooted the horn. Why don't you teach your scouts manners?"

"Can't be did, Jim. Let's take a pike at the place. Hello Fido, that you? You sure about them going as far as the mill?"

"Yop."

"Yop, hey? Well, that's not so bad. You'll get a second helping of dessert some day. Come on, who's going? Pile in. Mighty good of you, Jim."

A brief moment's inspection of the shed and they were off. Jim Burton drove the car and by him sat Scoutmaster Ned. The others, Safety First, Nick Vernon, Fido Norton and Charlie Norris, sat in back.

"Too many?" asked Scoutmaster Ned.

"She rides better with a load," said Jim Burton.

"I don't suppose there's much chance," said Ned. "You notified the cops, didn't you, Nick? Good. The battery is low and there isn't any crank on my bus and my only hope is that she'll lay down on them. Soak it to her, Jim."

"Do you want to stop and look at the tire marks yourself?" asked Norton. "It was that new Goodyear that I was tracking, the one that's all crisscross."

"You tracked it past the East road? So they didn't turn down there? Sure?"

"Yop."

"That's enough. Let's see her step, Jim."

Jim "soaked it to her" and she stepped. Not a bit of fuss did she make over it. Just stepped. A silent, fleet step, like the step of a deer. And the spectral trees on either side seemed to glide the other way, and east road seemed like a piece of string across their path, and Price's mill was but a transient rack and Valesboro was brushed aside like a particle of dust.

The car of a thousand delights could not do that. . . .

CHAPTER XXIX

VOICES

PEE-WEE, the irrepressible, was subdued at last. In gaping amazement he watched the Justice cross from the 'phone to the table, sit down, and begin to write. The demeanor of the Justice was anything but dramatic; he was calm, matter of fact, as if this were no more than he had expected.

"What do you mean, it's—in—his garage?" Pee-wee stammered. He was not at all defiant now. "Are you—were you talking—are you sure it was him?"

There was a note of sincerity, of honest surprise, in his voice which the Justice did not miss. And as for Peter Piper, his heart went out to this poor shabby little misguided fellow—whoever and whatever he was. He was so much at a disadvantage now, that Peter felt sorry for him.

"Now, sonny," said Justice Fee, breaking the tense silence, "I'm going to hold you till we get

to the bottom of this. Mr. Sanders, who's constable, is going to look after you (Pee-wee gulped and fingered his cap nervously) till we can overhaul that pal of yours. You're more to be pitied than blamed I reckon. There's altogether too much of this using small boys in criminal enterprises. I know," he added, holding up a warning finger, "he told you just what to say if you were caught, and you needn't say it, because, you see, I can't believe you."

Pee-wee was visibly sobbing now; he knew what "being taken care of" meant. He was afraid, yes, and bewildered at being caught in this cruel web of circumstance. But most of all he was incensed and shamed by this indignity. He could not trust himself to speak, he would break down. Something was wrong, *everything* was wrong, fate was against him, he could not grapple with the situation. If he spoke, he would say too much and lose his temper in that solemn hall of justice. And what would happen to him then?

His hands played nervously with his old cap, he bit his lips, and tried to repress the torrent that was surging in him. The outlandish old

gray sweater with its rolling collar bulging up around his small, jerking throat, did not seem comical now. It made him the picture of pathos. He did not dare try to explain; that wonderful old man would only catch him in another trap and perhaps send him to state prison. His breath came quick and fast; he could no more speak than he could escape. He wished that Roy Blakeley were there, and Tom Slade, who knew how to talk to grown-up men and. . . .

"Yes, and I'll pin the merit badge over your mouth if you don't keep still," he heard a hearty voice say. "Sure, wintergreen is good to eat! Go and eat some poison ivy for all I care. Do you think I'm going to be passing out merit badges for helping me to find my own car?"

"I wonder where they went?"

"I should worry where they went; I'm thankful we found the car. Maybe they've gone to join The Bandit of Harrowing Highway; he'll have pistols enough to go around, anyway; seventy was it?"

"And a couple of blackjacks."

"Well, we've got him beaten for a romance of

the road. Let's go in this house and see if we can scare up some gasoline. Jim, you and I ought to go into the movies—we'd have a six reeler called The Kids of Kidder Lake or Fido of Frying-pan Island. How's that strike you? Most of those kids don't need any pistols, they can kill time without them. We've got some dead ones over there, Jim, only they haven't got sense enough to lie down. What do you bet we don't get some gas in this house? Well, here goes for a knock on the door by Ned the Nabber, —*one* pistol."

Pee-wee held his breath, listening. What could this mean? Seventy pistols? Blackjacks? His old friend, The Bandit of Harrowing Highway? Dead ones? Was he indeed in the spell of some horrible nightmare? What on earth could this mean?

In a kind of trance he heard a knocking on the door and a lot of hearty, clamoring, bantering voices. They did not seem at all like robbers and cut-throats. They were not stealthy—a couple of million miles from it. Pee-wee rubbed his glistening eyes with that old cap that he held and blinked to make sure he was awake.

CHAPTER XXX

FACE TO FACE

Still in a daze, Pee-wee saw the old man step to the door; he heard a hearty, good-humored voice asking about gasoline. "If you could just put us on the track of some," the voice said; "we're good at tracking."

Tracking! Pee-wee's eyes opened. Tracking?

"Well, could we use your 'phone, then?" he heard.

The next thing Pee-wee knew, half a dozen boys and young men spilled into the room. All but one of them, and that was Jim Burton, were in scout attire. Pee-wee stood gaping at them as if they had dropped from the clouds.

Whatever their wee hour call meant they seemed all to be in high good-humor and amused at their own adventure. One of them, a scoutmaster as Pee-wee knew, was particularly offhand and jovial and seemed to fill the room with

his breezy talk. Peter Piper stared like one transfixed; they were scouts, the kind he had read about, the kind that were on the cover of the handbook! He backed into a corner so as not to get in their way. . . .

"Yes sir, we've had some night of it," said the young scoutmaster, falling with mock weariness into a chair, throwing one knee over the other and tossing his hat very neatly onto one foot. "My car is stalled in the road in front of the next house. I guess they ran out of gas. There's a sign up there says, 'road closed,' but I can't see anything the matter with it. Anyway, they ran out of gas and then ran out of the machine as I make out. They deserted it when the supply gave out, I suppose. All's well that ends well, only we need gas.

"I bet—I bet we've covered a hundred and fifty miles of territory to-night; what d'you say, Bill?" He didn't pause long enough to give Bill, or the Justice either, a chance to speak. "We saw the light in your window and just came in to see if you had a gallon or so of gas. We've got another car up yonder. Yes, sir, we've got The Bandit of Harrowing Highway looking like

a tame canary for adventures; hey Scout Nick? Nick's our signal shark——"

Peter Piper looked at Nick with humble reverence, and backed farther into the corner. He could not take his eyes from him.

Justice Fee was about to say, "Here is one of the culprits," but he did not get the chance. Scoutmaster Ned had the floor, also the walls and the ceiling. He seemed not to care anything about the culprits. All he seemed to care about was getting his Hunkajunk car back and recounting their adventures. Perhaps he was even a little grateful to the culprits for affording them such opportunity for adventure. At all events, he kicked his hat around on the end of his foot and filled the room with his quick, breezy talk.

"Yes sir, we rode to Bridgeboro, New Jersey, got a prize cup for my kindergarten class to try for, looked in at a show, saw a guy with a lot of [illegible] about, oh I don't know—rowed over to the island where we're camping, and these two kids rowed back to get the cup out of the car, and found the car gone and sent a signal that nobody saw and we came along in this

fellow's Packard. Well, we've got the old Hunkajunk back, anyway, haven't we kids? I'll say we have. These kids told the world only the world was asleep or something. Well, we've had pretty good luck at that, I'll say; we found the car, the school burned down—"

Suddenly, like a burst of thunder rose the recovered voice of Pee-wee Harris, while in frantic accompaniment his feet beat the floor and his small arms swung in wild excitement. With his deadly vocal artillery he silenced the breezy talk of Scoutmaster Ned and set the company aghast with his triumphant clamor.

"I've got an insulation—I mean an inspiration —listen—keep still—everybody! I'm the one that—that fixed it so you could have all those adventures—I'm the one—I got into the wrong car—in Bridgeboro—I saw that show and I thought you were the ones that had pistols and now I know that you're not murderers—because I was half asleep and I came out because I hate educational films but I like bandits, but I don't like real ones—"

"He likes *reel* ones," suggested Safety First.

"—And I met a thief and he was disguised as a

manual training teacher and now he's foiled because I asked him to help me take Mr. Bartlett's car back and it's already back, because this is a different car and I was under—I was disguised under the buffalo robe—and I wrote a letter under there and pinned it to a piece of sandwich with a safety pin that I was being kidnapped—you can ask anybody so that shows I'm not a bandit and I can prove I'm a scout—I don't care what anybody says because you can hang an apple on a string and I can bite it without touching it with my hands, and I'm the only one in my patrol that can do that and I'm not an enemy to you because if that school burned down I'm glad too and I've got seven merit badges and the bronze cross and if you find that letter I wrote you can see how that piece of sandwich fits my mouth where I bit it and that's better than finger-prints and I can prove it—I don't care what anybody says—I got into the wrong car and even the smartest man in the world—even—even—even George Washington could do that. I've got seven merit badges," he concluded breathlessly as a climax to his outburst.

With an air of profound solemnity Scout-

master Ned arose and made the full scout salute to the mascot of the Raven Patrol, F.B.T. B.S.A. "May I ask the name of the hero who was disguised as my buffalo robe?" he asked.

"Pee-wee Harris, only size doesn't count," said the scream of Bridgeboro's crack troop.

"Quite so," said Scoutmaster Ned; "George Washington might have been small once himself. Am I right, Nick?"

"Positively," said Nick.

"And the manual training bandit? May I ask about him?"

"He's *foiled,*" said Pee-wee. "I met him when I escaped from your garage; he gave me a lead pencil and he said he'd help me take the car back to Mr. Bartlett that took me to the show in his car. Gee whiz, you get sleepy sometimes, don't you?"

"Very, but I don't get a chance to sleep much with bronze cross scouts and manual training teachers to keep me on the move."

"Gee whiz, I'm sorry I woke you up."

"Not at all, the pleasure is mine," said Scoutmaster Ned." I live in a den of wild Indians; I seldom sleep. And our friend escaped? It

doesn't speak very well for teachers, does it? School—"

"Gee whiz, I'll help anybody to foil a school."

"Good. Come over here, Pee-wee Harris, and let us get at the details of this adventure; I have a hunch that you and I are going to be friends. You are a—what shall I say?—a bandit after my own heart. So you have seven merit badges and the bronze cross, eh? Do you think you could steal—excuse me—*win* a silver cup?"

"Can you drink out of it?" Pee-wee demanded.

"Positively—lemonade, grape juice, root beer—"

"Malted milk also. And a sandwich goes with it. I think that cup was made for a bronze cross scout. Come over here a minute."

Pee-wee went over and stood between the knees of Scoutmaster Ned. "He's mine, Bill," said Ned to his fellow scoutmaster," I saw him first."

Meanwhile you should have seen the face of Justice of the Peace Fee. He sat at his desk, with his long legs projecting through the middle, a cigar screwed away over into the corner of his

mouth, contemplating Pee-wee with a shrewd, amused twinkle. Not a word did he say as Scoutmaster Ned asked questions of the Raven's mascot, while the others listened and laughed.

CHAPTER XXXI

ALONE

But there was one there who smiled almost fearfully, as if doubting his privilege of mirth in that gay, strange company. He smiled, not as one of them, but in silent awe, and did not dare to laugh aloud. He hoped that they would not notice him and tell him to go home. He had dreamed of some day seeing such wondrous boys as these, and here they were before him, all about him, in their natty khaki, self-possessed, unabashed, merry, free. Was not that enough for Peter Piper of Piper's Crossroads?

Yes, that was enough, more than he had ever expected. It was like the scene he had "pretended" out in the little barn when he had presented himself with the fancied signalling badge.

Stealthily his hand moved to his ticking shirt and removed the campaign button. For there before him was a boy with a real, a *real,* signal-

ling badge. His eyes were riveted upon that badge; he could not take them from it. Suppose someone should ask him about the button; why he was wearing it now that Harding and Coolidge were in office? He would blush, he could not tell them.

He hoped that they would not notice him for he knew he could not talk to them, that his voice would shake and that he would go to pieces. Now that he saw them, joyous, uproarious, bantering, wearing badges on their sleeves, he realized that what *he* had done was nothing at all. He heard Scoutmaster Ned humorously belittling the exploits of his own heroes. No, Peter Piper would not step rashly into that bantering throng with that one exploit of his own.

So he stood in the bay window, half concealed by the old-fashioned melodeon, and watched them. Just gazed at them. . . .

And when they all crowded out he lingered behind and whispered to the music-master of the milk cans, "Don't tell them, Ham; please don't tell them anything—about me."

And so the party made their way along the dark road and Peter followed and heard the flat-

tering comments and fraternal plans involving the little hero from Bridgeboro. Evidently they were going to keep Scout Harris with them and have him patented, from what Peter overheard.

When they came to Peter's little home, Scoutmaster Ned discovered and spoke to him while Pee-wee was making an enthusiastic pronouncement about Jim Burton's Packard car.

"You live here, sonny?"

"Y—yes, sir," stammered Peter, quite taken aback.

"Well, now, I'll tell you what we're going to do. We're going to roll this stalled car a little way into your yard to get it off the road. All right?"

"Y—yes, sir."

"Then we're going on to where that little fellow lives. I have to see his folks and he has to get some scout duds and junk and stuff and then we're coming back. We ought to be here early in the morning."

"Y—yes, sir."

"You just keep your eye out for that car, will you? It has a way of disappearing."

"Y—yes, sir."

"I don't mean to watch it all the time, but just sort of have an eye out. I'm taking this little jigger out of the distributer, so no one could run the old bus anyway. But you just have an eye out, will you?"

"Y—yes, sir," said Peter anxiously.

"That's the boy, and some fine day you'll have a couple of autos of your own to worry about."

Peter smiled bashfully, happily. That was a wonderful joke. And a real scoutmaster, just like the pictures, had said it to *him*. He thought that, with the exception of Theodore Roosevelt, Scoutmaster Ned was the most wonderful scout that ever lived. He wondered how it would seem to know him all the time. Peter had no idea what a distributer was, but he knew now that *his* method of crippling an automobile was very crude. He was glad they did not know so they could not laugh at him. . . .

After the Packard car, with its noisy load, had started for that fairy region where they had movie shows and things and where Scout Harris lived, Peter was beset by an awful problem. He was not sleepy, he would not be sleepy for at least a year after what he had seen, and he in-

tended to watch the car as it should be watched. The question that puzzled him was whether he dared get into it or whether he had better sit on the old carriage step. He finally compromised by sitting on the running board. And there he sat till the owl stopped shrieking and the first pale herald of the dawn appeared in the sky.

And when the sun peaked over the top of Graveyard Hill and painted the tombstones below with its fresh new light and showed the gray frost of the autumn morning spread over the lonesome, bleak fields, and finally cast its cheery light upon the tiny, isolated home, it found Peter Piper, pioneer scout, of Piper's Crossroads, seated there upon the running board of Scoutmaster Ned's car, waiting for one more glimpse of those heroes. . . .

CHAPTER XXXII

ON TO BRIDGEBORO

SCOUTMASTER Ned Garrison had a middle name. Handling parents, that was his middle name. He was a bear at that. He could make them eat out of his hand. Had he not engineered the camping enterprise pending the preparation of a makeshift school? Parents did not trouble him, he ate them alive.

"You leave them to me," he said to Pee-wee as they advanced against poor defenseless Bridgeboro. "They'll either consent or we'll shoot up the town, hey, Safety First? We're on the rampage to-night; somebody's been feeding us meat."

It was not Pee-wee's custom to leave a thing to somebody else. He attended to everything—meals, awards, hikes, ice cream cones, camping localities, duffel lists, parents, everything. He was the world's champion fixer. You can see for yourselves what a triumph he made of not

rescuing the wrong car. That was merely a detail. If the car had been the right one and no one had stopped him from rescuing it he would have rescued it. Since everything worked out all right, he was triumphant. And he was better than glue for fixing things.

"I'll handle them," he said.

"Well, we'll both handle them," said Scoutmaster Ned.

A little farther along the road Safety First said, "I don't see why the road was closed off. It seems to me to be all right."

Pee-wee was now sufficiently subdued to think and speak calmly, and he said, "That feller with the shirt put it there; he said he read the signal. I guess he's crazy, hey?"

"Oh, the fellow with the shirt?" queried Fido Norton, humorously.

"I seem to remember a shirt," said Nick.

"That was it," Pee-wee said.

"He was just a little rube," said Charlie Norris.

"He's the one that said I was a thief," said Pee-wee. "I told him I could prove I was a scout by eating a potato a certain way."

"And he didn't take you up?" said Scoutmaster Ned.

"He didn't have a potato," Pee-wee said.

"It's best always to carry potatoes with you," said Scoutmaster Safety First.

"After this I'm always going to carry five or six," said Pee-wee.

"The proof of the potatoes is in the eating," said Nick.

"I know nine different ways to cook them," said Pee-wee; "and I can eat them raw so that makes ten. I can eat potato skins too, so that makes eleven."

"If you could eat potato-bugs that would make twelve," said Charlie Norris.

"If you eat lightning bugs, that will make you bright," said Pee-wee; "that's what Roy Blakeley says; he's in my troop. He's crazy and he says he's glad of it. We've got three patrols in my troop and I'm a member of the Ravens but I'm kind of in all of them. I know all about camping and everything. In the fall you're supposed to camp east of a hill, do you know why?"

"No, break it to us gently," said Nick.

"When you said *break it,* that reminded me that I can break an apple into halves with one hand."

"Do tell," said Charlie; "what do you do with the other half?"

"What other half?"

"The other one."

"If they're both the same how can there be another one? I eat them."

"Really?"

"I eat mushrooms too, only if they're toadstools they kill you."

"Why don't you eat a couple?"

"I *will* not, because you bet I'm going to stay alive. I'll show you how you can tell the difference when we get to that island. I'll show you a lot of things. Do you know how to pump water with a newspaper—rolled up? Gee, that's easy, I learned that when I was a tenderfoot."

"What are you now, a second hand scout?"

"I'm a first class scout and I'm a first aid scout and—Do you know how to make things out of peanut shells?"

"Will you show us that, too?"

"Sure, but anyway I never use chalk for scout signs; I use charred wood. Do you know why?"

"Because chalk reminds you of school?"

"Because it's got too much civilization in it."

"Do they put that in it?"

"No, but it's there. Gee whiz, I've got no use for civilization, I don't care what kind it is."

"Well, what about that codger?" asked Scoutmaster Ned. "He said he read the signal?"

"Sure, and he was the one that stopped us when that fellow ran away. Gee whiz, I didn't see any signal but I didn't look behind. Maybe he's just disguised as a rube, hey? Anyway, he stopped us, that's one sure thing, because we stopped and that proves it, doesn't it?"

"There's nothing the matter with the road," Safety First repeated.

"That's what has me guessing," said Scoutmaster Ned. "He couldn't have read the message, that little codger. He's just a poor, little country kid. I'd give a doughnut to know how he happened to put that rope across the road.

He never, *never* read that message, you can bet on that."

"I know! I know!" vociferated Pee-wee. "He had a—a—inspiration. Give me the doughnut."

CHAPTER XXXIII

HARK! THE CONQUERING HERO COMES BACK

We need not linger in Bridgeboro, the native haunt of Scout Harris, and of Roy Blakeley and his Silver-plated Fox Patrol, and the other celebrities of Pee-wee's troop. For the adventures of these world heroes may be found recorded by Roy's own hand.

It will be sufficient to say that the delegation from Kidder Lake descended upon the peaceful home of Pee-wee Harris (peaceful during his absence at all events) and carried it by storm. The anxiety of Mr. and Mrs. Harris over the whereabouts of their son being set at rest by his dramatic appearance at the head of his martial following, there was nothing for them to do but surrender to Scoutmaster Ned, while the party partook of breakfast in the fallen fortress.

"He will eat you out of house and home," warned Mrs. Harris; "I only want to warn you beforehand."

"We are prepared for the worst," said Scoutmaster Ned, as he contemplated his discovery wrestling with a saucer of breakfast food across the table. "In return for our poor hospitality he is going to show us how the world should be run, and we are to be his pupils. Now that we have stumbled upon him we couldn't close our season without him."

"I'll show you how to close it," said Pee-wee.

The one obstacle which might have stood in the way of these delectable plans—school—was removed by the fact that Scout Harris was to enter a private school (pity the poor private school) which did not open until after Columbus Day. We shall see him wished onto this institution in a subsequent volume.

The outlandish sweater and rakish cap in which Pee-wee had masqueraded through that eventful night were now discarded by order of his mother, and on the journey to Kidder Lake he appeared a vision of sartorial splendor in his full scout regalia including all appurtenances and sundries.

As a tribute, perhaps, to the island of which he was to be the imperial head, he flaunted his aluminum frying-pan, its handle stuck in his belt, ready

to fry an egg at a second's notice in case of emergency. That he might never be at a loss to know where he was at, his scout compass dangled by a cord tied in a double sheep-shank knot to harmonize with the knot of his scarf which could only be removed by lifting it over his head. Thus, though he might be lost to his comrades, he could never be lost to his scarf.

Twisted into the cord of his scout hat was an arrow pointing forward, which gave him an exceedingly martial appearance and was useful, too, in pointing out the way he should go and safeguarding him from the danger of going backward. But if, by an accident, he *should* go backward or sideways, he had the empty funnel of an old auto horn with which to magnify his voice and make the forest ring with his sonorous cries for help. And if the help did not come, he had still one cylinder of an old opera glass, with the lens of which he could ignite a dried leaf by day or observe the guiding stars by night. And if there were no dried leaves he had his crumpled piece of tissue paper. And if the stars did not shine, he had a rag for extracting confidential information from the wind. And if there was no wind,

he should worry, he had gum-drops mobilized in every pocket. Every safety device known to scout science (and many of quite original conception) were upon the martial form of Scout Harris, so that he could not possibly go wrong or starve.

So it was without any fear that he set forth for the untrodden wilds of Frying-pan Island notwithstanding that it was a quarter of a mile wide and nearly a third of a mile long.

CHAPTER XXXIV

PEE-WEE HOLDS FORTH

It was a delightful ride to Kidder Lake in the daytime. There is no time like the autumn—except the spring. And the spring is only good because it is the beginning of the summer. Just the same as the winter is best because the spring comes after it. As Roy Blakeley would have said, "You can do that by algebra." But there is nothing, either before or after, to make algebra good.

As Jim Burton's big Packard car sped along, the country looked bleak and the fields wan with their yellow corn-stalks. Even the little shacks where fresh fruit and vegetables had been displayed to motorists were now boarded up. Their cheerless, deserted look contributed quite as much as the changing foliage to the scene of coldness, desolation. The sad look which Nature assumes when school opens. The wind blew and the

leaves fell and the West Ketchem scouts fell too, for Scout Harris, who was also blowing.

"That's what you call a proincidence, how I don't have to go to school yet, the same as you don't on account of yours burning down. Gee whiz, I like camp-fires, but I like school fires better."

"And you'll show us how to make a camp-fire?"

"Sure I will; I'll show you how they do at Temple Camp. Is there anybody living on that island?"

"No one but us, and we'll have to be going home soon," said Charlie Norris.

"I like desert islands best," Pee-wee said; "they remind you of dessert. Sometimes I spell it that way. Don't you care, we have a month yet. Did you ever eat floating island? It has gobs of icing floating around in it. We have that Sunday nights at Temple Camp. When I said dessert it made me think of it. Sometimes islands disappear."

"I bet the ones in that dessert do all right," laughed Nick Vernon.

"You said it!" Pee-wee vociferated with

great emphasis. "I'll show you how to make tracking cakes, too, only you can't eat them."

"No?"

"No-o-o, they're for chipmunks and birds to step on so you can save their footprints. Gee whiz, did you think you could eat them?"

"We didn't know," said Fido Norris.

"Gee, there are lots of things *I* don't know too," said Pee-wee generously. "But anyway I fixed it so a scout could stay at Temple Camp an extra week."

"Bully for you. A good turn?"

"You said it. I gave him a whole pail of berries I picked and he got sick and couldn't go home."

"Some fixer."

"I've fixed lots of things."

"Maybe you can give us all berries the day before our temporary school opens," said Fido Norton.

"Don't you worry," said Pee-wee reassuringly; "maybe the men who are getting it ready will go on a strike; maybe there'll be measles or whooping cough or something. I've had those."

"You're not missing much, hey?"

"You said it. I've been lost in the woods too. Roy Blakeley says I get lost at C when I sing. He's crazy, that feller is. He started the Silver Foxes. There's a feller in that patrol can move his ears without touching them. I should worry as long as I can move my mouth. I'll show you how to flop a fried egg in the pan only you have to look it doesn't come down on your head. You can scramble eggs but you can't unscramble them. Once one came down on my head. I took a bee-line hike, too."

"With a fried egg on your head?"

"No-o-o. I'll show you how to make a thing to get olives out of the bottom of a bottle too; it's better than a hatpin, but a hatpin is good to catch pollywogs with. There's a Pollywog Patrol that comes to Temple Camp. Gee, I never knew that silver cup was in the car with me all the time."

"Well, we expect you to walk away with that," said Scoutmaster Ned. "You rode away with it once. So now we expect you to walk away with it."

"It's won already," said Charlie Norris. "Nick's the one."

"Gee whiz, I wish I had seen that signal," said Pee-wee, "but anyway I have to admit it was a stunt sending it. Gee, I guess you'll get the cup all right."

It was characteristic of Pee-wee that his thoughts did not recur to his lonely adversary at Piper's Crossroads. His thoughts were always of the moment and aroused by the present company. He was just as ready to shout for others as he was to shout for himself, and that is saying a great deal. It was immaterial to him who he shouted for so long as he could shout.

Nick Vernon was the nearest and likeliest, so he was all for Nick's stunt. And he was not in the least curious about the things said by that lonely boy with wide eyes who had stopped the car. He was thinking of other things now.

CHAPTER XXXV

SCOUTMASTER NED DOESN'T SEE

BUT Scoutmaster Ned was curious and when they reached the little cottage he jumped out and, taking the can of gasoline he had brought, he bade the others go on their way, saying that he would follow when he got his car started.

"Well sir, you haven't been sitting here all this time, I hope?" he said to Peter. "Nice brisk morning, hey? The kind of weather to give you an appetite."

"Wouldn't they wait for you?" Peter asked.

"I'm glad to get rid of them," said Scoutmaster Ned in a way of friendly confidence; "they make a noise like an earthquake; that little fellow's the worst of the lot; he ought to have a muffler."

"Is he a real scout?" Peter ventured.

"Oh, he's two or three scouts. What d'you think of them? Crazy bunch, hey?"

"They're all real scouts—are they?" Peter asked hesitatingly.

"They think they are. Now look here," he added, sitting down on the running board in a companionable way beside Peter, "I want you to tell me what made you say that road was closed. There was a light in the sky; you saw that? Big, tall light?"

"That—that fellow—named Nick—he made it."

"Yes, and what made you close the road? Somebody tell you the light meant something?"

"There isn't anybody around here," said Peter, growing more at ease as everyone did with Scoutmaster Ned, "except Aunt Sarah Wickett and she's crazy. There's nobody in this house but my mother."

"How about Mr. Fee? No? Well then, who told you to close the road? Come now, you and I are pals and you have to tell me."

A scoutmaster, a real, live scoutmaster, a pal of *his?* Why that was more wonderful than reading a signal. Peter's hands rubbed together nervously and he hedged, as a scout should never do.

"I want that scout to get that cup, the one that sent the message. Could—maybe could I see that cup—if it's in this car?"

In the excitement of the night, Scoutmaster Ned had forgotten all about the stunt cup (as they had come to call it). He now brought it forth from under the rear seat and unwound the flannel rag that was around it and polished it a little as he held it up. It shone in the bright morning sunlight and Peter saw his face in it. That was strange, that Peter Piper of Piper's Crossroads should see his own face looking at him from the radiant surface of a scout prize cup. He had never even seen such a good mirror before. He just gazed at it, and continued to gaze, as Scoutmaster Ned held it up. *Awarded for the*—it shone so, he could hardly make out the words—*for the best all scout stunt of the season.*

"It cost a lot of money, didn't it?"

"Oh, something less than a couple of thousand dollars. Look nice, standing on a scout's table, huh?" Scoutmaster Ned gave it another little rub and contemplated it admiringly. "We had enough of a fuss getting it, that's sure. See that

Maltese Cross on it? That's our bi-troop sign. We have two troops; always hang together. A troop's one bunch in scouting. That kid thought the Maltese Cross meant that the cup was to drink malted milk out of. He's a three-ring circus, that kid."

"It was a stunt to send that—to make that light, wasn't it?" Peter asked.

"Well, I'll say it was," said Scoutmaster Ned, giving the cup another admiring rub.

That settled it for Peter. He could not match his poor little exploit against such miraculous performances. The sight of those uniforms in the broad daylight had cowed him. The sight of Nick Vernon's signalling badge had brought him to his sober senses, and he felt ashamed even of his dreams and his pretending. The brief glimpse he had had of Scout Harris in all his flaunting array, going forth to new conquests surrounded by infatuated disciples, these things settled it for poor Peter. He thought himself lucky not to have drawn attention and been made a fool by those heroes. Maybe they would not all have been as considerate as Scoutmaster Ned. The safest thing, as well as the

thing nearest to his heart, was to stand for Nick Vernon. He could stand for him even if he was afraid of him. After all, a pioneer scout was not really and truly a scout. . . .

"I don't know why I put the rope up," he said nervously; "I just did. There is a—a bad place in the road if you're going fast—I'll—I just as soon show it to you—if you don't believe me. I thought maybe the light—but anyway I wasn't sure—and I'll show you that bad place. I guess he'll *sure* win the cup, won't he; the scout that made the light?"

"Shouldn't wonder," said Scoutmaster Ned, a little puzzled, but apparently satisfied. "Didn't you say something about a signal? To that little codger? Or was he dreaming? Or am I dreaming?" He scrutinized Peter very curiously but seeing no sign of the scout about him, he dismissed the receiving end of this business with Peter's rather awkward explanation, and let it go at that.

As for what Pee-wee had said, that did not worry Scoutmaster Ned. Pee-wee's dream and experiences seemed to be all mixed up together like the things in a hunter's stew. Scoutmaster

Ned went by the *signs*, which scouts do, and the signs were a funny ticking shirt and a pair of pantaloons like stove pipes. No hint of scouting there.

For you see the scout was *inside* of Peter Piper of Piper's Crossroads. That was why he was for Nick Vernon. It was *inside* him, and "disguised" (as Pee-wee would have said) as a checker-board shirt. And that was why Scoutmaster Ned couldn't see it. . . .

CHAPTER XXXVI

MORE HANDLING

AND so Peter Piper, of Piper's Crossroads, proved too much for Scoutmaster Ned. He kept his secret. But he had a very narrow escape from being a hero.

Scoutmaster Ned had his way, too. "So you think you'd like to have a pike at that camp, eh?" he said.

Scoutmaster Ned's theory about camping was to keep open house. If he lacked discipline (which it is to be feared he did) he made up in pep, and the surprises that he was forever springing on the camp were a perpetual joy. I suspect that he was not well versed in his scoutmasters' handbook. He was a sort of human north wind. He adopted the pose of being driven to distraction by "those kids" and he denounced them roundly and said there were too many of them and that he was going to pick out

one and drown the rest. Then he would show up with a new one. He was a sort of free-lance scoutmaster and I wonder how he ever drifted into the movement. Probably he didn't drift in, but blew in. Scoutmaster Safety First (Bill) was his balance-wheel.

"Where is she? I'll talk to her," he said to Peter.

So he talked with Mrs. Piper while Peter stood by. He sat down in the kitchen and drank a glass of milk and ate a piece of pie and told her that it was the first real piece of pie he had ever eaten in his life. Would he have another? Well, he'd say he would! Mrs. Piper thought he was about the finest "young gent" she had ever seen.

He told her all about his adventures of the night as if she were a pal and when she said she had slept through all the rumpus outside, he said, "Well, you've got West Ketchem, where I come from, beaten twenty ways. Could I have just one little sliver—no, not as much as that —well, all right. That town, why you couldn't wake it up, Mrs. Piper, not with an earthquake. It would just fall down through the crack in the

earth and go right on sleeping—no I couldn't eat another speck. We must be off."

"We?"

"Oh yes, Pete's going with me. He's going to make us a little visit for a week or two. We have lessons and everything, study nature, and all that, and all he wants to eat. I'll bring him back, he wants to see the real scouts in captivity. No accounting for tastes, hey, Mrs. Piper? You'd better bring along a coat, Pete; but don't change your clothes, you're not going to church; come just as you are, so I'll be able to tell you from the rest in case I should decide to kill them all. That let's you out, see? Come ahead before your mother changes her mind."

Poor Mrs. Piper had not yet made up her mind, so she could not very well change it. Scoutmaster Ned had made up her mind for her.

"I'll have to get Sally Flint ter come over and visit with me," said Mrs. Piper doubtfully.

"Just the one," said Scoutmaster Ned. "She'll keep you company and you'll have a little peace with this youngster gone. Mrs. Piper, if I had my way I'd chloroform every boy in crea-

tion. I wonder you look so young with a wild Indian like that around."

"Oh, I ain't lookin' so young," she smiled, greatly pleased.

Before she realized it she was shaking hands with Scoutmaster Ned while her other arm was around Peter. "I'm going to come here and stay a month," the young man said. "I'm going to churn butter and eat pie—if I can escape from that outfit. Well good-bye, we're off. I hope the old bus runs."

"It looks reel smart with all the blue paint," said Mrs. Piper.

"Handsome is as handsome does," said Scoutmaster Ned. "Climb in, Pete, what are you scared of? It won't eat you. Anybody'd think you were stalking—stepping so carefully. Know what stalking is? They'll show you."

Mrs. Piper stood holding her gingham apron to her eyes as they rode off. It was of exactly the same pattern as Peter's shirt. He looked funny sitting rather fearfully on the front seat. She had never dreamed of seeing him enthroned amid such sumptuousness. Perhaps some day he would go away and come back *rich*—a hero.

Her Peter. And this stranger liked him. She was weeping because she had never heard her boy called Pete since his father died. She liked to hear him called Pete, it was so friendly, and recalled the past so vividly. . . .

As if Scoutmaster Ned would have called him anything else than Pete!

CHAPTER XXXVII

HINTS

THEY showed him. As Scoutmaster Ned had told him they would do, they showed him. And Peter Piper was in dreamland; it was all too good to be true. They showed him how to track and stalk. And how to signal.

Nick showed him how to make a smudge fire, and Peter was doubly sure, then, that Nick would win the cup. In the nights he dreamed of the winning of that cup, of Nick winning it. Yes, they showed him. Fido Norton showed him how to track a rabbit, and a small-sized, pocket edition of a scout in the Elephant Patrol showed him (very difficult) how to trail a hop-toad. Charlie Norris showed him how to use a deadly kodak, which Peter had never seen before. He liked it because it pulled open the way a turtle's neck comes out, and then went in again. Oh yes, they all showed him.

And meanwhile Peter Piper kept his secret

and no one ever knew of his little exploit, for which the handbook really deserved all the credit. The adventure of the stolen car was now forgotten in a hundred new activities, and with it the rope across the road and the lantern and all that. Sometimes when they spoke of that, Peter was troubled. But they did not often speak of it. And he did not even tell them that he was a pioneer scout. Harding and Coolidge he now kept in the pocket of his stovepipe pantaloons. For Peter Piper was approaching scouthood through the tenderfoot class. Yes, they were all busy showing him.

Scout Harris showed him. Oh yes, he showed him. But Scout Harris was too busy showing all the rest of them to do any exclusive showing for the pioneer scout. And besides, Peter, who was too new and too bashful and too awed by his companions and surroundings to be a good general mixer, was mostly occupied with his hero, Nick Vernon. Pee-wee, who was a mixer as well as a fixer, went on mixing and fixing and soon he performed his greatest of all "fixing" feats; probably the greatest fixing feat in scout history.

Perhaps the greatest fixing stunt in the history of the world.

But Peter was satisfied to laugh at Pee-wee with the rest of them, with that bashful, hesitating laugh, which endeared him to them all.

It was natural that he should follow Nick Vernon about the island, for everyone liked Nick, who was quiet, humorous, modest and withal very resourceful and skilful. He had a kind of a contained air, as if he knew more than he gave out, in contrast to Scout Harris who gave out more than he knew. A bantering, off-hand way he had, as if all the things he did (and he could do many) were done just to kill time. Skilful though he was, he did not take himself too seriously. Everything he did he seemed to do incidentally.

He would wander aimlessly into some triumph. "Going tracking?" they would say. "Guess so," he would answer. He never made a fuss. The general impression that he gave was that scouting was a good enough way to while away a summer. Peter Piper worshipped at the shrine, winning scout personality. He hoped that his mother would allow him to stay for the finish so that he

could see Nick receive the cup. He watched, jealously, anxiously, the stunts of the other scouts, but none of them could be mentioned along with Nick's signalling.

One morning Nick sauntered down to the shore, Peter with him.

"Going to wigwag?" they asked him.

"Maybe, if there's anyone to wigwag to. No use talking if there isn't anyone in town to listen."

"Scout Harris talks whether there's anyone to listen or not," one said.

"Shall I bring the card to wigwag with?" Peter asked.

"No, don't bother. Got some matches? Never mind if you haven't."

Peter ran back and got some.

"If you're signalling tell them not to hurry with the school, we can wait. Scout Harris is giving us an education. He's going to move the lake to-morrow."

"He's a queer duck," one of the party sprawling around the tents said as the two made their way down toward the shore.

"Who, Pete?"

"No, Nick; jiminy, it always seems as if—I

don't know—as if he has something up his sleeve."

"It's his arm," commented a joker.

"Maybe he knows about a mystery," Pee-wee said; "maybe there's treasure buried on this island."

"There'll be some scouts buried on this island if we all die laughing at you," another scout observed. "Come on, let's dig some bait."

Nick did not decide what he was going to do till he reached the shore. That was just like him. Peter was all excitement.

"Are you going to signal?" he asked.

Nick often signalled over to town and sometimes he got an answer, for there were other scouts over there. He did it just for pastime. Usually it was the wigwag that he used. But on this morning, noticing the dried leaves all about, he said, "We'll try a smudge, that's pretty good sport; Morse Code, you know." He looked about half-interestedly and began kicking leaves into a pile, Peter doing the same. If Nick had any particular purpose in this business, at least you would not have supposed so. He seemed as aimless as a butterfly.

'Are you going to ask about school?"

"No," laughed Nick, dragging some leaves with his foot; "there's no school for a month, we know that. If you know a thing you know it; isn't that so?"

"I don't know many things."

"No? Well, get some water in your hat—here, take mine. These blamed scout hats are made to hold water."

Peter brought some water, which Nick poured on the leaves.

"Now haul that old raft up here and we'll hold it up. We'll just say *'hello'* to be sociable, show the town we're not stuck-up."

They held the old raft, of about the area of a door, slanting ways over the leaves, and Nick showed Peter how to manipulate it so as to control the column of black smoke arising from the damp leaves. Peter was greatly interested, even excited, over this new kind of signalling. He was not quite as careful as he had been in talking with Scoutmaster Ned.

"Make one long one first to call their attention," he said, quite aroused by the novel enterprise.

"Yes?" said Nick, half interested apparently. "Who told you that?"

"I—I just knew it. I know now—let *me* do it—it's easy. Only they have to be careful over there. "That's—that's the hard part. I hope they have a—one of those books over there—and then—maybe—I hope they keep it open at page two hundred and eighty-four. Let *me* try it—"

"Ned give you one of those books?"

"N—no, I—I saw one."

"Hmm."

"Well, let's get busy with the message, Pete."

Nick Vernon did not seem greatly interested in where or when or how Peter had seen the handbook, nor how he happened to remember page two hundred and eighty-four. But one thing Nick Vernon knew (it was a reflection on Scoutmaster Ned and just exactly like him) and that was that *there was not a single copy of the scout handbook on Frying-pan Island.*

CHAPTER XXXVIII

THE FIXER

"ALL right, you can do as you choose," said Pee-wee; "only I'm just telling you. There's always better fishing on the east side of an island because that's what Uncle Jeb up at Temple Camp said and he knows—he knows—"

"He knows all the fish personally," said Charlie Norris.

"You think you're smart, don't you?" thundered Pee-wee. "There's a better spring over there than there is here and then besides, the rain will drain out better on account of the ground being higher, because I know all about camping, you can ask my scoutmaster. It won't be so cold over there at night, either; you see. You move the tents over there, gee whiz, Arabs move their tents every day, and look at gypsies, they keep moving all the time."

"It will be a scout movement," said Scout-

master Safety First, rather impressed with Pee-wee's arguments.

"I'm game for anything," said Scoutmaster Ned. "Variety is the spice of life. The housing situation—"

"I know all about the housing situation," said Pee-wee; "my father owns a house and the water's calmer on the east side of an island, because I can prove it by the Pacific Ocean."

"The Pacific Ocean is west of here," said Scoutmaster Ned. "At least it was when I went to school. I dare say it's there yet. Put another log on the fire, Nick. How about it, Pete? Where's the Pacific Ocean? I'll leave it to Pete."

"It's in the school geography," Pee-wee shouted from the other side of the camp-fire, "and it's on the east of China. You have to know where you're at before you can tell where it is and there's better fishing in China than there is here, because in Japan they catch sardines! Temple Camp is on the east side of Black Lake, and anyway there's a dandy place over there for tents and there are a lot of birds' nests and there's a better spring and you don't have to

carry water so far and you always spill a lot of it and there are a couple of pine trees and the leaves don't fall off them, because there aren't any leaves and leaves keep the rain and wind off but not if there aren't any and these trees are getting bare—"

"Enough! Enough!" said Scoutmaster Ned, rising, and sticking his fingers into his ears. "We ask for an armistice. All we ask for is three hours' time in which to move—"

"I'll fix it," vociferated Pee-wee.

"We surrender to the world's greatest fixer," said Scoutmaster Ned. "The high authority from Temple Camp—"

"He isn't so high!"

"Size don't count," roared Pee-wee.

"Shall be followed," said Scoutmaster Ned. "To-morrow morning we'll move to the east side of the island in view of the thriving metropolis of East Ketchem. Its four lights will cheer us at night. This spilling of water must be stopped. Pretty soon the island will be under water and then where will we be?"

"Worse off than in school," called a voice.

"I am for the pine trees," said Scoutmaster Ned. "I am for the high land and the fishing and the birds' nests and the shelter. In short, I'm for Scout Harris!"

"I'm for the view of East Ketchem as long as I don't have to go there," said Fido Norton.

It was the silly, tail end of the season; they were ready to do almost anything, except go to school. They were going to have the last minute of the last day of this delightful little supplementary season, this autumnal climax of their camping life. But aside from this resolution they cared not what they did. Pee-wee, instead of getting on their nerves, had gotten into their spirits. A change of location wouldn't be half bad. And Pee-wee was right too, in much that he had said; they realized this. And he admitted it.

"Sure, I'm right," he said; "you leave it to me. I'll fix it. We'll move over there to-morrow and if you're sorry now you'll be glad of it because—"

"Oh, it will be a day of rejoicing," said Scoutmaster Ned.

"Anything goes," said Charlie Norris.

"Lead and we'll follow, Scout Harris," chimed Fido Norton.

"One place is as good as another if not better," shouted another scout.

"All in favor of moving, say Aye."

"Aye!" shouted Pee-wee, in a voice of thunder.

CHAPTER XXXIX

BETRAYED!

THE next morning they folded their tents like the Arabs and moved to a spot which Pee-wee recommended, on the opposite side of the island. Why he liked it I do not know, for it was a quiet spot. Perhaps he liked it because it was retiring and modest, and kept in the background, as one might say. It seemed to breathe peacefulness, which was Pee-wee's middle name. It afforded a fine view of East Ketchem, the thriving community on the east shore of Kidder Lake; and the crystal spring, and stalking facilities, and better shelter of the stately, solemn pines, seemed in accordance with scout requirements.

"Well, we're here because we're here," said Scoutmaster Ned, sitting down on two loaded grocery boxes after his last trip. "If the spring water doesn't come to us, we come to the spring water. Not half bad at that," he added, looking about. Indeed they had not been familiar

with the eastern shore of the island and now they contemplated the discovery of Christopher Columbus Pee-wee, not without surprise and satisfaction.

"When I go to a place I always leave it—"

"Lucky for the place," interrupted Nick in his dry, drawling way.

"I always go on expeditions," Pee-wee explained. "I even discovered islands and things. I discovered a mountain once, up at Temple Camp, only somebody discovered it before I did. I discovered this place day before yesterday when I was tracking a mud-turtle. Once I found a peninsula only it wasn't there the next day."

"Who took it?"

"The tide came up and it was under water. Do you want me to show you how to make drain ditches around tents?"

They put up the tents and dug drain ditches around them and cleared a place for the campfire and brought wood for it. They chopped supports for their messboard and drove them into the pine-carpeted earth and laid the long boards upon them. To do Pee-wee justice, the

place was an ideal camping spot. And what was one day's work of moving, against almost an entire month of camping in that sequestered glen, among fragrant pines?

"You've got the right idea, Scout Harris," said Scoutmaster Ned.

"It was a—a inspiration," said Pee-wee.

"Do you have those often?" Nick asked.

"*Oh boy!* I have them all the time."

"But how about a landing place?" a scout asked.

"Who wants to go to East Ketchem, anyway?" said Norris. "We should bother our heads about a landing place."

"Leave it to me. I'll fix it," Pee-wee said.

In the late afternoon they sprawled about and found the velvet coverlet of pine needles restful to their weary bodies.

"Well, it's all over but the shouting," said Scoutmaster Ned. "All we need is sup—"

"I'll do it!" shouted Pee-wee.

"What, the shouting?" asked Nick.

"Here comes a boat," said another scout.

Maybe somebody's going to discover the island," said Pee-wee.

"There are two men in it," said another; they're rowing straight for us."

"Maybe this is their camping spot," said Fido Norton; "I knew this place was too good to be missed all this time."

"If it's their place—"

"Leave them to me, I'll fix it," Pee-wee announced vociferously.

"That relieves us," said Scoutmaster Ned, lying back on the ground, after sitting up to inspect the approaching boat; "we are safe in the hands of Scout Harris. Let them come. We should worry our young lives."

The boat made straight for the new camp, and it appeared to contain two men. The one who was rowing wore a large straw hat and his suspenders were visible.

"They're scoutmasters!" Pee-wee shouted. This seemed as good a guess as any.

The two men landed, drew the boat up very methodically and approached the camp.

"Good afternoon," said Scoutmaster Ned, dragging himself to his feet and seating himself upon a grocery box. "Beautiful fall weather we're having. Just a little crisp out on the

water, eh? Won't you sit down—if you can find something to sit on?"

Whether the weather was crisp or not, the man who spoke first was very crisp indeed.

"You in charge of these lads?" he asked.

"Well, we're all sort of in charge of each other," said Scoutmaster Ned. "I guess I'm the goat."

"He's all right," Pee-wee said; "you take it from me."

"Well," said the man in a drawling but ominously conclusive tone, "my name is Rodney, Birchel Rodney; and this is Mr. Wise, Mr Barnabas Wise. We came from East Ketchem."

"I don't blame you," said Scoutmaster Ned. "I'm happy to meet you, gentlemen. This is a sort of table d'hote scout outfit that you see here; two troops and a couple of sundries. Will you stay and have supper with us?"

"We ain't fer interferin' in no boys' pleasures," said Mr. Barnabas Wise, "but it's our dooty to tell you that we're the school committee of the village of East Ketchem, and s'long as these youngsters hez moved inside the taown

limits of East Ketchem they'll hev to report for school at nine o'clock to-morrow morning. The taown line between East Ketchem and West Ketchem runs right through the middle of this island."

A gaping silence followed this horrible pronouncement.

"We—eh—we are just camping here, pending —" began Scoutmaster Ned.

"It ain't no question uv pendin'," said Mr. Birchel Rodney. "The ordinance of the village of East Ketchem says that every minor—"

"We're not miners, we're scouts!" Pee-wee shouted.

"The ordinance of the village of East Ketchem," Mr. Rodney proceeded, ignoring the boisterous interruption, "says that every *minor*, which is spelled with a o, between the ages of eight years and fifteen years, resident *or* visiting *or* otherwise domiciled—"

"You can't say I'm domiciled—" Pee-wee began.

"Or otherwise domiciled," the terrible man continued, "must attend school in said village *ex*cept upon cause of illness—"

"I'm sick a lot," Pee-wee yelled.

"I expect to have a cold very shortly," said Nick in his funny way.

"Determined and certified by a physician *in* good standing. Them's the very words of the village law and we come to tell you that all these youngsters will hev ter *re*port for school at nine A. M. to-morrer morning, *in* said village of East Ketchem."

"Foiled!" said Nick, falling back on the ground.

"Horrors and confusion!" said Fido Norton.

"That we should live to hear this!" moaned Charlie Norris.

"Oh, what have we stepped into?" another groaned, holding his forehead in a way of despair.

"You mean what have we been drawn into!" said another. "Oh, that it should come to this!"

"What have we done? What have we done?" sighed still another.

As for Scoutmaster Ned, he gave one terrific groan (or perhaps it was a roar of abandoned mirth) and fell backward off the grocery box.

Only the fixer remained silent. His eyes

stared, his mouth gaped. But not a word said he. It was Napoleon at Waterloo. Scout Harris had no words. Or else he had so many that they got jumbled up in his throat and would not come out. And as he stood there, bearing up under that mortal blow, the conquering legion, consisting of the two members of the East Ketchem school board, withdrew with an air of great conclusiveness and dignified solemnity to the shore.

Then, and only then, did Scoutmaster Ned sit up and rub his eyes, holding his splitting sides, the while he gazed after that official delegation constituting the entire school board. He gave one look at the fixer (and the fixer's face was worth looking at) and at the gaping countenances all about him. Then he fell back again and shook as if he had a fit and rolled over and buried his face in his folded arm and roared and roared and roared.

"Retreat! Retreat across the line! A disorderly retreat! That is our only hope! Who will lead a disorderly retreat?"

The desperate cry was not unanswered. *I will!"* said Fido Norton. "Get the stuff to-

gether! Every scout for himself! Our freedom hangs on a disorderly retreat! Vaccination—I mean evacuation—is our only hope! Our freedom is more dear than our lives! Give me vacation or give me death! We've been foiled by a school principal disguised as a boy scout! Remember his pal, the manual training teacher? Spies! Traitors! We fell into their clutches. Follow me, we will foil the schools yet! Every scout grab his own stuff, or anybody else's, and retreat as disorderly as possible. Our liberty is at stake! I love the west shore so muchly now that I wouldn't even knock the West Shore Railroad.

CHAPTER XL

GUESS AGAIN

ALAS, such is fame! The thunderous voice of P. Harris was mute, his blankly staring eyes spoke volumes, libraries in fact, but they did not make a noise. The voice which had aroused the echoes at Temple Camp, which had filled the crystal back room at Bennett's Candy Store in Bridgeboro, was still. And it did not speak again for—nearly twenty minutes. Even then it did not speak in its former tone of thunder. It could not have been heard for more than—oh, half a mile.

The first occasion on which the voice of Scout Harris arose to its former height was on the last day before West Ketchem summoned its bronzed scouts over to the makeshift school which had been prepared in a vacant, old-fashioned mansion. They had had plenty of fun in the meantime and they went with a good will. Far be it from me to publish any unworthy hopes,

but if your school should ever burn down in the summer, try camping in the autumn. You will find the woods more friendly then. Even the birds and chipmunks and squirrels seem to say, "Come on, let us get together and be friends, for it's getting cool."

But to return to Pee-wee's voice. On the last day of the autumn camping, the silver stunt cup was to be awarded. It was an open secret that this was to go to Nick Vernon, and the scouts of both troops were agreeable enough to this disposition of it.

Many of them had performed conspicuous stunts, but they were all agreed that Nick's feat in flashing the message by searchlight was the stunt of the season. Perhaps Nick's personality, and consequent popularity, had something to do with this. At all events when the two troops were ordered to congregate under the old half-naked elm, to which they had returned after their inglorious invasion of the east, it was generally understood that the ceremony of presentation was to be purely perfunctory having no surprises for anybody.

Safety First had been asked to do the honors

but he had insisted on Scoutmaster Ned making the address. That address has even been memorable in West Ketchem history. It was (as Scoutmaster Ned himself said) the best address ever made on Frying-pan Island, because it was the only one.

"Bunch," he said "this is the happiest day of the year, for school opens to-morrow (groans). Hereafter, whenever I see a frying-pan I'll think of you and wish you were in it, being fried to a turn. (Laughter.) Don't laugh, it's no laughing matter. I'm on the verge of nervous presumption or whatever you call it, and I'll be glad to get rid of you—every one of you!

"I've been asked to hand out this cup and it goes to St. Nicholas Vernon because he sprawled the nice clean sky all up with scribbling and all that kind of stuff. Nobody read the message but that makes no difference, because the proof of the message is in the sending just the same as the proof of the pudding is in the eating. How about that, Scout Harris?

"I guess you fellows are all satisfied and I should fret my heart out whether you are or not. Nick showed resource, and alertness, and a lot

of other stuff that's in the handbook, page something or other. If it isn't there it's somewhere else. Shut up and give me a chance to speak. Here you go, Nick, catch this. Your silver cup of joy is full and we shall all live happily ever afterwards. Anything more, Safety First?"

Nick Vernon never seemed more at ease, and less interested, than when he ambled toward the stump from which Scoutmaster Ned was descending, and said in a quiet, drawling voice, "Yes, something more. May I have that stump a minute?"

He stood there, holding the silver cup in one hand, his other hand against his hip, in an attitude familiar to them all.

"A little speech of thanks," someone shouted; "make it short."

There was one who stood in that group, unnoticed. His eyes were fixed upon the winner, and he was actually trembling with delight.

"Good idea, I'll make it short and snappy," said Nick. "Actions speak louder than words."

"No, they don't," shouted Pee-wee.

"The signal I sent," said Nick, "was read and the one who read it was a scout. He's the one

that stopped the car. The cup was in the car and so he saved the cup. It's his. He tried to keep his scouting a secret and he didn't get away with it. He beat Scoutmaster Ned hands down. He left him guessing. Scoutmaster Ned is easy. But this kid can't put anything over on *me;* I've got him red-handed; he's a scout and he's got us all looking like thirty cents. He's a scout and he'll tell the truth, if you corner him. He won't lie. Here you go, catch this, Pete, hold your hands steady; if you don't hold them up I'll chuck it plunk in your face. As sure as I'm standing here I will! *I'm* making this speech of presentation, not Scoutmaster Ned. You know so much about the handbook, remember law one, about telling the truth. Here you go, Peter Piper, you're the only scout that ever dropped into this Frying-pan. Catch it or by gosh—"

But he didn't catch it, because his eyes were glistening, and his hands were trembling, and you can't catch things in such a state.

He stood there like one transfixed, hearing the uproar all about him. Nervously he stooped and picked up the glittering cup and held it as if he were afraid of it. Peter Piper, pioneer

scout, of Piper's Crossroads. He would go home famous and rich, a hero, just as his mother had dreamed that some day he would do. . . .

It was just at that moment that Scout Harris really recovered his voice. He recovered it in the moment of having an "inspiration." He jumped upon a barrel, released his teeth from the apple into which he had plunged them, and dancing like a maniac, sang at the top of his voice:

"Peter Piper picked
A peck of pickled peppers;
A peck of pickled peppers
Peter Piper picked.
If Peter Piper picked
A peck of pickled peppers;
Where's the peck of pickled peppers,
Peter
Piper
picked?"

Then, finding the place in the apple where his mammoth bite had been interrupted by his inspiration, he completed the bite, eating and singing at the same time.

It was one of the great scout stunts of the season.